

# WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

ADVENTURE IN  
THE LAKE CHAD REGION

BY

HEINRICH OBERJOHANN

LONDON

DOBSON LIMITED

## CONTENTS

AUTHOR'S PREFACE	5
DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD	13
LAKE CHAD	30
MY FIRST ELEPHANT AND MY FIRST BATTLE	35
THE HERD LIFE OF THE CHAD ELEPHANTS	56
THE ROGUE ELEPHANT	86
THE ELEPHANT BURIAL GROUNDS	99
SCENT AND TELEPATHY	104
MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL THEIR CHILDREN	116
ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY	142
THE DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS	166

## ILLUSTRATIONS

THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT	<i>frontispiece</i>
Photo Ministère de la France d'outre-mer	<i>facing page</i>
VILLAGE AT LAKE CHAD	32
THE LAKE CHAD COUNTRY	32
Photos Ministère de la France d'outre-mer	
A FULL-GROWN ELEPHANT	48
Photo Ministère de la France d'outre-mer	
ELEPHANT HERD MOVING THROUGH THE BUS	64
Photo Paul Popper, London	
ELEPHANTS WADING THROUGH SWAMP	80
Photo Paul Popper, London	
A DEAD GIANT	112
Photo Express, Paris	
A MEAT GROTTO FOR THE NATIVES	128
Photo Express, Paris	
CAPTURED YOUNG ELEPHANTS AT PLAY	144
Photo E. Lebied (Congopresse)	
A FAMILY GROUP	160
Photo H. Goldstein (Congopresse)	

# **WILD ELEPHANT CHASE**

## **ADVENTURE IN THE LAKE CHAD REGION**



## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

I SHOULD LIKE to begin with a quotation from an American explorer: 'We have known the elephant for a thousand years,' he said, 'yet we know practically nothing about him.' My very first encounter with wild elephants brought home to me the truth of his words.

'But how *can* that be true?' my readers will ask. 'Every time you go to the zoo, you see an elephant; children ride on his back without fear. And yet you say nobody knows him.'

Many observers, both experienced and inexperienced, have written about this great animal, but we cannot rely too much on their accounts. Most of them come from traders, men who are chiefly interested in ivory, or from missionaries who are prone to repeat the incredible tales they hear from natives. Very few people can be rated as scientific explorers.

Why is it that even the scientists have fallen so far short of their goal, and have added so little to our knowledge of the life history of the elephant?

Primarily, it is a question of time, time that must be measured in terms of the relative longevity of man and elephant. Even an earnest explorer has, at best, scarcely fifty working years at his disposal, and according to my estimate the life span of an elephant is well above a hundred years. This discrepancy in time bars the achievement of really scientific results.



## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

To begin with, let me describe our march to Lake Chad, one of the most trying and physically exhausting experiences of my expeditions. My decision to capture elephants in that particular region was made very suddenly. A French professor, who happened to be working in the neighbourhood of the lake, had heard that the biggest elephants in the world were supposed to live there. As soon as this was relayed to me, I decided to explore the locality without delay. So, one day I stood before the English Resident of Bornu Province, in British Nigeria. After an extremely friendly reception, I brought up the question of obtaining a licence to capture elephants. As this was not a usual request, I was not surprised when the Resident asked me many questions. In spite of his friendliness, I got the distinct impression that he was not taking me quite seriously. He asked the same question three times: 'Are you sure you don't want to shoot the elephants?' Having answered 'no' each time, the Resident finally said: 'All right, but just tell me exactly where you want to catch them.'

'I am not just interested in bush elephants,' I told him. 'I've been thinking about the elephants of Lake Chad.'

The Resident seemed relieved. 'You can capture or shoot as many as you like there,' he said, 'but I'm afraid you won't have much luck in reaching that country at this time of year. This is the end of the rainy season, and the road is nothing but mud and swamp.'

In order to drive home his point, he sent for some boys from the Lake Chad region. They not only confirmed the Resident's words but swore by Allah that

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

conditions were much, much worse than he had painted them.'

I said good-bye to the Resident and began my preparations for departure. I knew very well that no European had ever gone to catch elephants by himself, either in Africa or in India. Certain that I was alone in my ambition to catch elephants singlehanded, I did not wonder that the Resident had his secret doubts about me.

The Resident's warnings and the Allah-invoking natives notwithstanding, I decided to march to Lake Chad. Next morning I sent a request to the Minister of Labour for twenty-two bearers and a headman..

To be on the safe side, I kept the loads to a weight of thirty-five pounds per man and distributed them among sixteen bearers. This meant that I would still have six bearers in reserve. With an excellent map provided by the Resident, I started off together with twenty-two bearers, a headman, and two good horses, high-spirited stallions, full of fire and insolence. The smaller of the two deserves special mention.

This little stallion was equipped with every kind of devilry, but his courage made you forget his many pranks. Again and again, at the most unexpected moments, he would try to run away with me, dashing under low-branched trees in an attempt to knock me out of the saddle. In spite of the fact that he was never successful and was always given a taste of my crop for his trouble, he never gave up his breakneck escapades. I would wait till the last possible moment before pulling him away from the tree he was heading for, telling myself bitterly, 'Either Shu (that was the little devil's

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

name) can crack his skull or he can knock some sense into it.'

During my four-year stay at Lake Chad, I must have tried out at least thirty stallions in my work with elephants. Not one of them could be trusted to stand his ground at such close distance as Shu. Only twenty yards away, he would stand quivering, with bowed head, facing the furiously screaming elephants, waiting for my command, 'Shu!' Then, with a catlike leap, he would be off. He was so sure on his sinewy legs that he never once fell with me. That means something when you are galloping wildly through steppe grass which reaches above the heads of both horse and rider, making it impossible to see hyena holes or termite hills at any appreciable distance. In the midst of the jump he would somehow manage to communicate to me some coming hazard. It was almost as if he were saying, 'Watch out!' And immediately I would shift my weight to his hindquarters and we would be going ahead again. Whenever there was any serious work to be done, he stood his ground, perfectly aware of what was going on. I trusted my life to him without hesitation and he never betrayed that trust. I shall never forget that little demon who saved my life on more than one occasion.

But to get on with my expedition. My goal was the village of Kinghava, which, according to the map, was about five miles from Lake Chad. Our start went off without a hitch. I got my bearers off at an early hour, and followed them four hours later with the idea of catching up with them in the afternoon. For two hours I dreamed in my saddle, far removed from reality, when suddenly Shu stopped abruptly under an acacia

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

tree. I realized what had happened just in time to prevent a first argument between us. My gear had all been piled neatly under the tree and out from among the bundles crawled my headman, a light-skinned Arab, swearing that he was not to blame for the affair.

Of course, it would have been contrary to all the rules had the first day's march passed off without a hitch. After trudging along for about eight miles, my bearers had simply tossed their loads under the tree and, defying the orders and pleas of the headman, made for an out-of-the-way village in order to eat, enjoy themselves, and rest.

Galloping through the tall steppe grass in search of my boys, I figured that at our current rate of eight miles a day, it would take us a good thirty-three days to reach the northern end of Lake Chad.

With this depressing thought in mind, I burst into the village to find all my boys happily enjoying life. With raised fist, I walked past them to the palaver hall, greeting them with a friendly '*Usse usse*', according to Berberi custom.

Even the smallest African village boasts a palaver hall. Sometimes it is the crudest structure in the hamlet – a few crooked poles stuck into the earth, roofed with long sticks, and a few straw mats laid across the top – and sometimes it is built like a palace, by native standards. It is the town hall of the village. Almost every morning the oldest men collect for a palaver, talking over the good and the bad that has taken place in the last twenty-four hours, and trying to settle all the disputes that have broken out among the villagers – or among themselves.

This particular palaver hall had two exits. One of

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

them could be closed off with a straw mat and some logs. After I had seen that this was done, I sat down comfortably on a straw mat on the floor as if, like a native, I had all the time in the world. Then I ordered my headman to fetch the money bag containing the coins, so that he could pay each bearer his day's wage of sixpence. This forced all my men to enter the palaver hall. When I had caught them all safely in my trap, I rose, planted myself in front of the exit and commanded my headman to gather in the money, which had been poured out for all to see. Excitement among the bearers rose to fever pitch. They knew at once what was up.

Strangely enough, it was the smallest of the bearers who jumped at me, trying to push me away from the exit. I gave him a good shove, just hard enough to help him return to his friends. With the Berberi words, '*Oongunu kutte*' (hand over your money), I demanded from each of them the shilling advance which he had received from me the day before. Then, with the parting words, 'You are sacked,' I let each man slip out of the hall. When I had finished with the last bearer, I at once mounted my horse and rode back very slowly to the tree where my equipment had been left. The loads had miraculously disappeared, and the footprints of my men showed plainly that they must have moved off in the direction I had stipulated.

The bearers did not run off to a village again without my permission. I did not catch up with them till evening, when I ordered them to seek out one of the villages of which there were many so near the provincial capital.

It poured during the night. You must actually live

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

through something of this kind to get an idea of the enormous quantity of water this type of monsoon can bring with it. For this reason the villagers build their huts on dunelike elevations.

The evening before, marching in a south-westerly direction, we had waded through about two feet of water. Now, leaving the village by the same route, we struggled through not two but five feet of water. That was just a preview of how water was to hamper our future progress.

With remarkable calm, my men rolled up their blankets, spread them over their heads, and packed their loads on to them, helping each other obligingly. And, just as calmly, they marched off and soon were up to their necks in water.

It was hard going. The ground was a slippery mass of clay and treacherously uneven to boot. I had to admire my boys as, methodically, they tested the ground with their feet, the human eye having become useless. In this country you had to have eyes in your toes. After two hours of slogging, I saw that any control or supervision had become impossible. It was every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost'.

Each man had to find his own way. No matter how often I counted them, I could never see more than six or eight of my bearers at a time. Standing on my horse's back, I looked out over the lush, green grass-ocean which engulfed us, but not a hopeful sign could I see, neither woods nor elevation. For more than an hour, we had been caught in this innocent-looking green flow of tightly interwoven couch grass. It formed an insurmountable barrier which could neither be pushed aside nor torn apart.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

On several occasions I had to urge Shu forward with a taste of leather. Then he would turn and look at me reproachfully and I could read plainly the message in his eyes, 'Why don't you at least get off my back once in a while?' I would have liked to do him that favour but I knew from experience that a horse gives of his best only when he is mounted.

Whistling to my headman, who always stuck close to me with the big stallion, I changed mounts and handed Shu over to him. He gave him plenty of trouble, stubbornly refusing to move ahead even though he was now riderless. Finally, I left both of them behind. If they couldn't manage to push on, they would just have to go back.

The day passed in one long, desperate struggle until suddenly it was dark. I could no longer either see or hear my boys. It was my first night in this wide maze of swamp. I was lost, cut off from the world by a sea of rank, green vegetation. In years to come I was to suffer through many nights of this kind, but all of them were easier to bear than this first one.

When at last day came, I found myself on a sand-bank. A few thorn bushes decorated the bare, desolate mound, which was enclosed in the wide frame of measureless green ocean.

Some of my bearers had already arrived, and for the rest of the day we numbered seventeen men. At last, to my great joy, the headman appeared, leading little Shu. Now there were only six men missing. I decided that they probably had given up the fight and had returned home. For the time being our motto was 'Rest!' One night of glorious rest in which to gather strength for the morrow. Ahead of us lay more of the

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

same limitless, seemingly impassable waste that we had just crossed.

Although our stomachs were empty, we were full of hope as we marched off that third morning, for the headman had promised that by noon we should reach a wood ~~and~~, much more important, a village where meat was to be found.

Once more the same lush, impassable sea of grass hampered our progress, but, in spite of this, after about three hours of marching, we forgot all our troubles, for we had come to a dense wood. Men and animals from a near-by village crowded around us. An hour later all my boys had round, protruding bellies, and, flinging themselves down under the trees where they had just feasted, they sank into a deathlike slumber. At that moment no power on earth could have induced those children of nature to do any more marching.

Our fourth day began. Again, the same impressive behaviour on the part of my boys: the same primeval calm in the face of a gruelling march. All of them had listened to the tales of the villagers who swore that Allah had not only made the route difficult but had rendered it practically impassable. Completely untroubled by this information, they rolled up their tattered blankets as they did every morning and, packing small snacks into the bundles, lifted them on to their heads. A few minutes passed before all the loads were so skilfully balanced that no hand was needed to hold them in place. Stark naked, they strode off into the morning, fighting their way forward through the treacherous swamps.

It must have been about eleven o'clock when I suddenly discovered that Shu was no longer with me.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

Until then he had trailed along of his own free will. Now, although I could not see him, I could hear his shrill, frightened whinnying coming from the distance.

An hour later I lost my big stallion, too. The constant climbing through couch grass that came up to his throat had tired him out. When I tried to remount him, his forelegs gave way and he sank helplessly, headfirst, into the water. I lost my balance and fell off, disappearing for a moment in the grass and losing my reins in the process. The stallion took this opportunity to disappear for good.

I discovered an old acacia tree close by. It was already dead, its branches reaching up out of the swamp like the arms of a corpse. I managed to get to it and to climb it cautiously. From this high lookout I was able to survey the deceptively innocent-looking green swamp.

In that wide ocean, nine dark points were clearly visible: my bearers. They were widely separated. Two of them were resting their loads on the couch grass; the others had already pushed forward to the reed wall through which all of us must pass. I jumped down from the tree and fought my way slowly ahead, foot by foot.

My only wish was to be where Shu was, for by now that rascal must have reached the nearest village, where he was most probably contentedly munching millet gruel out of a calabash. Six months later, when the swamp had partially dried out, the Chief of the village sent Shu after me, minus his saddle, of course, according to the custom of the country. My big stallion I never saw again. Probably one of the deserting bearers had made off with him.

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

At night I chose a guiding star which I could not, under any circumstances, afford to lose if I did not want to spend the entire night marching around in circles like a madman. A deep darkness covered the world. Since leaving the dead tree early in the afternoon, I had not seen or heard anything of my bearers. I was tormented by a host of unanswerable questions: Where could my bearers be? How many of them would get through? Would I ever see any of them again? Could I push through alone? Would this struggle ever end? . . .

There was nothing to do but keep going . . . inch by inch. Suddenly, the end had come! A dark barrier, a wall of impenetrable black reeds, barred my way. I remembered hearing that no white man could cross a reedy ocean of this kind, but I told myself, what a black man can do, a white man can do. So, talking to myself in an effort to spur my courage, I hurled myself against the dark wall.

These reeds die off every year and each of them is about two inches thick. They lie on the water like logs, haphazardly piled up. Through this confusion of dead, wood-hard reeds, there grows a tangle of new green stalks which knit the old reeds into a solid mass. The stalks tower more than six feet above the water line. I had to shove my way through them backwards because only back and neck are able to withstand a beating of this kind.

After a while I raised my eyes. It was only when I looked straight up that I could see even a meagre piece of sky. The stars were lost to me. Now I was forced to work my way forward with no beacon to steer by. My only hope was to keep moving.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

I have no idea how long this exhausting business went on. It was certainly past midnight when I heard the hysterical, jubilant scream of a hyena. Usually, I hated the sound, but that night it was music to my ears. It told me the direction of the dry land for which I had a desperate longing.

Inch by inch I ploughed on. Soon day must come. The hyena had long been silent. Suddenly, I hurtled through the black reed wall. Ahead of me lay a greyish white strip, behind it loomed a dark barricade . . . a forest. Now that I was standing once more on firm ground, reaction set in. I was unable to fight the exhaustion and dropped to the ground.

Half lying, half sitting, I struggled to pull off my wet garments. I stripped to the skin. To rest, to lie down, to sleep and forget, that was all I wanted. Before I knew it, I was asleep.

A wonderful, beneficent warmth flooded my body. It grew hotter and hotter. I was burning up. I wanted desperately to run away. Once again I summoned all my strength, telling myself to stand up. Then, with a cry of relief, I sat bolt upright.

Five men were crowding around me; they must have heard me screaming. My body was burning under the heat of the sun, which was already high in the heavens.

I wanted to jump to my feet, but the muscles of my arms and legs were knotted in a cramp that gave me terrible pains. I wanted to scream but, instead, stretched out flat. It was only then that I recognized five of my own people who were gathered around me: my headman, Ibrahim, and four of the bearers – Momodo, Achi, Bukhari, and Colo. I will never forget

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

the names of these five men who, with me, survived this first trip to Lake Chad.

They had hunted for me faithfully all morning. Now our only problem was food. '*Kvo abintshi*' (bring food), I called to Ibrahim. But that was easier said than done. Probably Ibrahim would have agreed with me, but he did not argue. '*To bature*' (very well, sir), he said, and disappeared, taking two of the boys with him.

After two hours he came back, without any food but accompanied by a large crowd. One of the natives sat high on his horse and I judged he must be the *Sarki* (king).

This village Chief, to give him his proper title, had brought his palaver people – I should say, his 'ministers' – with him. Two of them were carrying roosters, another a calabash full of pounded millet, and a third had a bowl of sand on which some eggs were lying.

I remained quietly on my bed of sand, covered only with a few clothes. The Chief got down from his horse, gathered his loose gown around him, and came toward me.

I acknowledged his greeting in silence, responding only by raising my fist. After that, the 'ministers' presented their gifts. I refused the two roosters as being too old, but accepted the rest gratefully. Getting up cautiously, I mounted the Chief's stallion. He ran along at my side and led me to his village. There, for two shillings, I bought a ram which the six of us (for no more bearers appeared that day) devoured completely. Believe me, after a meal like that the world looks rosy.

I decided to make our sixth day a day of rest, in the hope that some of the missing men would still manage

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

to fight their way through to us. But this hope proved futile. Nevertheless, we stayed on in the village, for I had a little business matter to transact with the Chief.

I had taken an immediate liking to his stallion and wanted him at all costs. A horse like that, I told myself, born and bred in the swamps, will certainly be able to pick his way through this bewildering country and will adapt himself easily to any emergency that may arise. Although I had seen another horse in the Chief's yard, an old, rawboned mare, the mother of the strong three-year-old, I could not persuade him to sell his stallion. Finally, we made a bargain; he would lend me the animal for the duration of the rainy season.

On the morning of the eighth day I was ready to start off once more with the few men who were still with me. We rode through the bush for an hour before coming to a water hole. Here my stallion decided to go his own way and we had our first disagreement, which ended with his turning around and galloping straight back to the village without so much as a by-your-leave. This time the Chief assigned a twelve-year-old boy, one of his numerous offspring, to come with me and lead the horse.

Once again we set out. In a little while I got my second surprise of the day. The stallion fought his way through every obstacle, now sinking into the swamp up to the saddle pommel, now breaking through the reeds at the exact place where the water was lowest. Gauging the country with amazing accuracy, he forded dangerous water holes in a fraction of the time we would have taken without him and, with unfailing instinct, ferreted out the passable stretches of reed or underwater sand dune. I abandoned all idea of playing

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

the master. I had learned my lesson from our argument of the morning.

My men were able to follow quite easily through the gaps that the stallion cleared, and it was thanks to him that we arrived safely at our day's destination. We reached Kukhava in the midst of a terrific down-pour. As my bearers had contracted to accompany me only up to this point, I was now obliged to release them. Not one of them wanted to leave. From now on, however, since they were no longer to do bearers' work, I paid them by the week instead of by the day.

That evening, the Sarki of Kukhava sent a messenger to announce that he would visit me the following morning. He arrived with a mounted escort of forty men, and after we had exchanged greetings I asked him if he could lend me some boys to help me catch elephant. He looked doubtful and repeated the old superstition: if you rob an elephant mother of her child, she will come and kill you. Now I knew the worst, I could expect no help whatsoever from this quarter. I wondered how on earth I was going to catch my elephants.

There was nothing more to be done in Kukhava but recruit six men for our final, long march to Kinghava, which was a day and a half away. And, having settled this question, we marched off toward our goal, Lake Chad and its giant elephants.

According to time-honoured custom, the new boys went on strike after a three-hour march. They wanted their wages for the entire trip in advance. My old bearers tried to discourage the newcomers in this but it did no good. They were like children who at least had to have a try at it. On this occasion I got to know

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

the taciturn and solitary Colo in his true colours. Although he was no longer a bearer, he packed together two loads, hoisted them on to his head and marched off and in passing knocked down two of the new men with a few well-placed blows. The new bearers saw their jobs being snatched from them and fought to regain their loads. Then the other old-timers took heart. Under my protection, they grabbed the remaining loads away from the new men, set the bundles on their heads, and departed. Even the head-man carried his share.

We arrived in Kinghava early the following afternoon in the midst of another downpour. In less than two hours the natives built a house for me out of steppe straw. It was a beautiful hut. Unfortunately, it was not waterproof, but to make up for that, I had the canvas from my tent. As I no longer owned a camp bed – that had disappeared with the bearers – I had to sleep on the ground. But that is no hardship for a healthy man. By way of a mattress I had a thick square of woven swamp grass; and I slept as soundly on this as one would in the most luxurious bed.

The first thing I did next morning was to take a look at my immediate surroundings, but after walking only a few minutes I found water underfoot and it got deeper as I went on. When it came up to my waist, I climbed a near-by tree. Looking east, I saw wave after wave of reeds stretching like a vast sea to the horizon. In the distance, beyond the reeds, I noticed a dark elevation but when I looked westward I could see nothing but forest. Suddenly I realized that this must be Lake Chad and that my map, which placed the village of Kinghava five miles away, must be incorrect.

## DEPARTURE FOR LAKE CHAD

Climbing down from my lookout, I questioned one of the boys about the lake. All he could do was repeat, '*Cura-cura ingi*' (big, big water).

At last, on the eleventh day, we had arrived at the home of the Lake Chad elephants: myself, four bearers, the headman with the Biblical name of Ibrahim, and the son of the village chief who had lent me his horse. Of twenty-four people who had set out, only seven had reached our destination. Nearly all the equipment was lost, with the exception of a few rolls of rope and a box containing cooking utensils. But what did it matter, as long as we had got here at all?

## LAKE CHAD

AS FAR BACK as the 1800's, scientists began to explore Lake Chad, and many of them lost their lives in the attempt. All of them chose the difficult and disastrous desert route. Above them blazed the desert sun, underfoot lay nothing but the burning sand, and before their eyes ~~there~~ shimmered and glittered a wide, opaque mass of ~~hot~~ air. Dreaming of water, their throats parched, many collapsed to die in the wilderness of sand.

To-day, at the right time of year, the approaches to the lake can be negotiated by car without too much difficulty. But even though modern equipment has made this kind of travel much easier, there are still vast regions which call for everything an explorer has to give in the way of courage, endurance, toughness, and strength.

Lake Chad can be divided into an inner and an outer lake. The outer lake is at least three times as large as the inner one. The open, or inner, lake extends for about nine thousand square miles, and the outer lake for about thirty thousand square miles. It has no outlet and is fed by three main rivers, the Shari, the Logone, and the Kamaduga Yobe. The area of the outer Chad varies according to season and from year to year. It is therefore impossible to give its exact size.

The lake proper has many hundreds of satellite lakes which are grouped around it in a defensive girdle. They all lie treacherously hidden in the lake's enveloping outer garment, an ocean of undulating

## LAKE CHAD

reeds which the human eye cannot span. These innumerable lakes are full of dangers. Their deceptively smooth surface tempts one to risk a leap, whereupon one sinks into treacherous mud. Others are completely covered with aquatic plants - vast expanses of innocent-looking white flowers which hide a similar threat: disappearance into the swamp. An untrained eye may even miss the crocodile, with its eyes and nose barely distinguishable from the huge, leaves of the swamp growths. As a matter of fact, these mighty reptiles want no traffic with man, least of all to gobble him up. It is the crocodile who fears being devoured by man, and he prefers to take evasive action.

It takes courage and stamina to break through the treacherous outer region of Lake Chad proper. First, there is the broad belt of thick reeds. Then comes a much more impenetrable wall, the papyrus swamp. The outer defence, the reed ocean, with its hundreds of small and large lakes, can be traversed by anyone who is physically fit, since the hippopotamus and the elephant have broken tunnels that lead to the papyrus swamp. The papyrus, however, is another matter. Probably no white man can understand what it means to negotiate a swamp of this kind.

Chad attains its greatest depth between November and April (there may be a month's variation either way), when great masses of water break out of the inner lake, pour through the raised papyrus swamp, and rush into the outer Chad. When the inner lake floods and penetrates into the outer lake, the water takes on a dark, blue-brown colour. It is only when the flooding stops and the water level of the inner and the outer lake is equalized that the colour

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

disappears. After about two months the water of the outer lake is crystal clear and deliciously refreshing.

The discolouration is caused by the fact that the masses of water must run through the papyrus swamp to reach the deeper, outer regions. The colour is so lasting that it dyes the faeces of the men and animals who drink it. I mention these facts because they made my work much easier. The water is coloured more or less deeply according to the width of the papyrus belt through which it must flow. In the northern Chad, for example, the water is very dark, while in the southern-most corner it remains almost clear. If at this time of the year I found animal droppings, I knew at once, without following the tracks, from which direction the animals had come. This saved me a great many troublesome marches.

The lake is dependent on the rainfall from a wide, surrounding country. In the Chad proper, the rainfall, even at its maximum, is unable to replace the water lost by evaporation. Paradoxical as it may sound, the fact is that Lake Chad reaches its lowest water level precisely at the end of the rainy season. At that time large parts of the outer Chad dry up; the medium-sized and small lakes are completely without water.

When the lakes have dried out to a depth of about one foot, they suddenly begin to crawl with strange life. The mudfish begin to travel over the land in search of the deeper lakes which hold their water the year round. In a line several hundred yards long, one behind the other, the fish propel themselves forward by a lightning-quick thrashing of their tail fins. They rest by day, moving on if someone comes near enough to frighten them. The air is filled





## LAKE CHAD

loud, continuous chattering, so that *you* are the one who now jumps with fright. I have never understood why the fish do not begin their migration while the lakes are still connected by water channels.

At this time, all the animals living in the lake region are in desperate straits. The elephants are forced to withdraw entirely from the northern sector and they are soon followed by most of the antelopes. Wild boars and various kinds of ~~water~~ birds seek out the middle and southern regions ~~because~~ of the countless deep-water lakes that are situated ~~there~~. This southern region is a great labyrinth of lakes of all sizes, and even with the best native guide it is difficult to pick one's way through it.

Of the many creatures that make Lake Chad their home, there is one ~~that~~ needs special mention – the most numerous, the most aggressive, and the most terrible – the mosquito. I have never used a net anywhere on my expeditions and have always been able to sleep soundly without – but at Lake Chad I had finally to take protective measures. I took a large old bathrobe, lengthened the sleeves so that they fully covered my hands, and at night put this coat on over my thin, self-tailored leather suit. Head and neck I wrapped completely in a thick Turkish towel, leaving room only for eyes and mouth. In order to protect that part of my face from these terrible tormentors, I had to smoke my pipe right through the night. If I fell asleep, I was awake again after a few minutes and, wiping my face with my hand, there would be a bloody sticky mess ~~on~~ by the innumerable insects that had settled on my face and drawn my blood.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Lake Chad there

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

is not, as in other regions, a seasonal respite from these pests. Not even the searing drought that lasts more than nine months of the year, or the desert heat which makes the air quiver, reduces the clouds of these horrible blood suckers.

During the rains, flies in incredible swarms come to join the mosquitoes. They will cause the horses to throw themselves on the ground and roll desperately to get rid, at least for seconds, of these pests, if they are not free to ~~run~~ through high grass or dense bushes where they can brush off the swarms of flies that settle on them.

At night, man and beast have to seek the protection of smoking fires. Around me, four fires were kept smoking from dusk to dawn. Each horse had its own fire, and two to three boys shared one fire. If a horse's fire died down, it carefully groped its way to the next fire, and often, when my boys awoke, they found above them, not the night sky, but a horse's belly. Frequently at night I got up and, with my hand, rubbed neck and chest of the tortured animals, pushing away a thick and bloody mess. A horse that has worked for a year at the shore of Lake Chad takes more than a year, under the best of care, to recover from the hardships.

In the dry season, the mosquitoes cease to bother one at a distance of from four to eight miles from the lake. But for my work I had to ride near the lake, even at night.

The natives, too, are helpless against these myriads of blood-sucking insects. They live in villages at a respectful distance from the lake. In and around the lake there are only a few tiny fishermen's huts, one of which is Kinghava, my headquarters for four years.

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT AND MY FIRST BATTLE

I WAS GLAD that I had kept my original bearers with me at Kukhava, for, apart from these men and one very likeable recruit whom I hired my first day in Kinghava, I was unable to enlist another man.

Bukhari II, as I shall call him since I already had one Bukhari, was an elderly Berberi man, with a cheerful, roguish expression, but, as he was rather weak, he could no longer carry a load. He insisted that he knew the whole of Lake Chad and he was always positive that he could tell where elephants were to be found. As things turned out, both these statements were exaggerations. Nevertheless, though many of our trips led us into blind alleys because of Bukhari's bad directions, I never quarrelled with him and he stayed with me all the years I worked at Lake Chad.

So Bukhari II became our guide. One day he pointed toward the north-west, and, looking around in a manner that was at once secretive and frightened, he signalled the arrival of an elephant herd. Noticing his uneasiness, I asked him if he was afraid of elephants. He swore by Allah that he wasn't in the least afraid of *elephants* but he was afraid of *Mallam*, the village Chief, for if the Chief knew he had betrayed the presence of the elephants to me, he would call a big palaver. However, Bukhari added, as I was a white man (and also much bigger than the Chief!) he wasn't so terribly afraid.

Nevertheless, Mallam arrested Bukhari II during the night and had him put in clumsy shackles. The

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

headman brought me the news the next morning. I went at once to see Mallam and demanded to know why he had arrested my guide. The Chief told me he had arrested the unfortunate man because he had not turned over the money he had received from me.

We were ready to take off and only Bukhari was missing so I told the King that he must release the man at once, since I was the one who had paid him and since he was going to work for me. Should the Chief refuse, I added quietly, he would have to refund the money to me immediately. Mallam, a small, fat Berberi man, glared at me with animal rage and brandished his fists threateningly under my nose. I jumped back to get my nose out of range and quite unconsciously my hands formed themselves into fists and I could not resist a quick, light left to his chin. The result was that Mallam lay down in the sand for a little sleep. His ministers, who had arrived for the morning's palaver, were delighted with the outcome of the argument. They screamed a happy '*Usse usse*' at me and freed Bukhari II.

The villagers, who until now had remained cautiously in hiding, groaning under the heel of the tyrant, now came joyously outside and stood in front of their grass huts, laughing and greeting me happily.

This encounter cleared the air for good. Now nothing stood in the way of my first march to the large elephant herd, and soon we were trudging off into the warm, awakening veld. We were eight all told: the four bearers, the headman, Bukhari II, our horse-boy, and myself. On our right there stretched an endless forest, and on our left lay a sand dune which stretched toward the north-west. We travelled along its base.

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

After only an hour we came across elephant tracks leading to the west. As I looked at the tracks, it seemed to me that I could already see the great beasts themselves. My pulses throbbed, urging me on. I burned with the fever of my hunt.

After eleven o'clock we were forced to interrupt our march, for at this time a scorching sun makes rest imperative. A little after two o'clock we started off again, heading directly east toward Lake Chad to ensure our night's water supply. We reached the shore of the lake before sunset and made camp.

I have no sympathy for those explorers who load themselves down with useless and cumbersome equipment: mosquito nets, hammocks, filters, ointments, powder, shaving things, European provisions, and liquor. To me, these luxuries are a nuisance which hamper one's movements and add little to comfort. All I have to do is spread my mat on the ground, shove my saddle under my head, and cover myself with a couple of blankets.

As for food, Nature sets such an ample table that there is no need to worry about to-morrow's menu. There is always an opportunity to shoot or snare a meal of geese, wild duck, guinea hen, doves, small antelope, snakes, and monitor lizards. In addition, there are wild boar, game of all kinds, the whole stork family, cranes, ibis, heron, pelicans, and a host of wild birds. Everything is edible and everything tastes delicious, if you have a good appetite. I make a point of never shooting large antelope for the dinner pot, and always pack a bag of peanuts and a bag of beans in my cook-box. I eat only once a day as the natives do, either in the late afternoon or at night, depending on circum-

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

stances. Sometimes I don't eat at all for twenty-four hours. And the same with drinking - I drink where the wild life drinks.

After the men had brought water, when the fire was burning and meat roasting, my boys faced to the east for their evening prayers. An old man, who had appeared from heaven knows where, led them in their devotions. At the end of each prayer, all the men joined in a deep, groaning 'Allah', bowing their heads to the ground. Before darkness fell, Bukhari II and the old prayer-leader harpooned six large fish. Together they must easily have weighed a hundred pounds. I was surprised that they had caught such a wealth of fish in less than an hour, but I was even more surprised when, two hours later, the entire catch had disappeared into the stomachs of the eight men . . . and all this on top of a forty-pound gazelle.

We had to get up shortly after midnight as, by four o'clock, the elephants would have disappeared from the reeds and lakes of the outer Chad. This midnight rising was the hardest thing I asked of my boys, but I could do nothing about it because I could not count on success unless we arrived at our location before the elephants came crashing through.

On the second morning my boys were up before I was. The High Priest still lay in front of the fire, sleeping soundly, but I did not wake him because he was not one of my own people. Through the still dark morning there came the deep, jerky, screaming laugh of the hippopotami. They were very close to us. After a short, grey dawn, the red ball of the sun glowed in the east, dispelling the last aches from our joints and giving notice of a hot day. I could just make out a few,

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

still-shadowy animal forms – hyena, delayed by some late kill, hurrying homeward in the dawn, hopping up to get their bearings above the high grass that cut off their view. Their squat, ugly heads rose for a moment, then disappeared. In front of me lay the droppings of a hippopotamus, so fresh they still steamed. As I took a close look, my boys screamed '*Matshige*' (snake!), and, throwing away their loads, they ran out of the danger zone. From a safe distance they pointed to the place where a snake lay. When I approached, it shot away, but from the movement of the grass I could trace its course. Believing itself hidden by the tall grass, it was coiling itself quickly up again, but now I had it by the neck and was lifting it high.

It was a python, eleven feet long! I stowed it away in the feed bag and that afternoon it was ceremoniously interred in the stomachs of my boys.

Now we were constantly running into a perfect maze of elephant tracks, many of them a day old. Completely under the spell of the great beasts, I saw, smelled, and heard them. The air was oppressive, suffocating, laden with elephant. A terrifying scream, different from anything I had ever heard before, crashed through the air and jolted my senses with indescribable force. All my ideas of human superiority were shattered by this one scream coming from a living flesh-and-blood being. At such times man becomes very small indeed. He needs time to gather his wits and to tell himself: That is only the cry of an animal, and I – I am a man.

Even my boys, with their healthy, natural instincts, reacted in the same way. We needed time to recuperate. Although no one said anything, we all knew that the elephants were close at hand.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

We halted at a convenient spot. I ordered Bukhari II to come with me and help find the elephants. The others had to stay behind. Bukhari II raised all sorts of objections and, although I was unable to understand what he was saying, I knew well that he didn't want to come with me just then.

For the second time that morning my boys prayed. Their lips moved silently, and it was only as their foreheads touched the ground that the one word 'Allah' broke forth from the depth of their souls in a groaning wail.

The old, sleepy High Priest had followed our tracks and had found us. Clenching his hand into a fist and raising it heavenwards, he called to me in high good humour with his usual '*Usse usse*'. Bukhari's eyes glistened now and I guessed the reason for his earlier objections. He wanted the priest to give him Allah's blessing before going with me to risk his life among the elephants.

The men were a long while at their prayers. Whenever I thought, 'Now this is the last "Allah", thank heaven', the High Priest would begin to pray again with an even longer flow of words.

Not in the least reassured and bearing his load of blessings with considerable difficulty, Bukhari II appeared before me in a mood of resignation, ready at last to set off with me on his first expedition to the Lake Chad elephants. Only his eyes remained unchanged and twinkled at me with all their habitual mischief.

For half an hour we worked our way through the thick reed barricade, Bukhari II leading by way of numerous trails and tunnels which were to bring us

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

closer to the elephant herd. My inability to judge our distance from the herd played havoc with my nerves and nagged so tormentingly at my senses that I decided to turn back. The element of deception in judging the distance of a herd is so great that even at two hundred yards you feel as though you are right in the midst of the elephants. Also, there is the depressing fact that you are standing in five feet of reeds and water, so that you can't even see three feet ahead of you. Under these conditions, the two most important senses, sight and hearing, are useless. But, where eye and ear fail, your sense of smell takes over.

What happened next to Bukhari and me was like the end of the world. It probably lasted only a few terrible moments but it seemed an eternity. All our faculties froze in horror. An old bull, acting as sentinel for the herd, and completely hidden by the high reeds and deep water, charged us with a horrible, ear-splitting cry. Six tons of elephant driven by the will to destroy hurled himself at us, and we had nothing but our bare hands with which to defend ourselves.

It is impossible to say what happened next. The mind doesn't react clearly in moments of crisis. Somehow, I instinctively did the right thing at the right moment: I threw myself to one side and dived under the water like lightning.

When I finally collected myself enough to rise, I could hardly walk. My knees trembled as if I were just struggling to take my first steps. It was no help to tell myself, 'Hein, remember, you're forty-five years old.' I tried, but it did no good, my legs continued to shake in a humiliating way. And, what was worse, I discovered that my bowels had given way at the

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

critical moment. After this I lost my last remnant of self-confidence.

And what had happened to Bukhari? Had all his prayers to Allah served to protect him? Just at that moment an ash-grey mask rose from the water and stared at me. Wordless, we stood side by side, looking at each other in horror. Although it seemed endless, this incident also could only have lasted a moment.

Until then the air had been filled with thunderous trumpetings. Now it was suddenly empty. It was as if life itself was holding its breath. But even this death in the air lasted only a few seconds while the real drama played itself out among the reeds and water.

Neither of us had recovered from fright when our ears were again deafened by a howling commotion. The whole herd was moving away at a quick pace. We sat there, in the midst of the uproar, showered by water, not daring to breathe or to take a single step. Indeed, where could we go? There were elephants all around us.

I could no longer resign myself to this terrible waiting. I had to act. '*Taffi*' (go!) That was meant for Bukhari, and it was the first word I had spoken to him since the elephant had charged us. But Bukhari would not budge. Instead of answering, he pushed me away with his two hands and his terrified lips formed the one word, '*Komoon*' (elephant).

So I left Bukhari II behind and went on by myself. I had hardly walked thirty feet when I came to a great river. The elephants must have moved along it only a moment ago, trampling down the reeds and leaving a wide stretch of open water. This meant that they had gone, and the danger with them.

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

But my senses were tricking me once more. I still felt as if I were in the midst of the elephants. The crashing uproar made by the breaking of the reeds, together with the enormous water displacement produced by two hundred elephants moving off at the double, still rang in my ears and seemed to come at me from all sides. And very close to me I seemed to hear fearful trumpetings which were repeated at regular intervals.

At the first cry, I quickly dived under water. Everything was clear when Bukhari II, partly recovered from his fright, came after me. '*Tata komoon*' (little elephant), he whispered and pointed in various directions. It took me a little while, however, to see what he was pointing at because the water was cluttered with broken reeds which floated on the surface in a confused mass. The reeds, littered with elephant droppings, had the look of dark brown islands. Out of the midst of this chaos protruded a small elephant trunk, lifting itself like a ~~tearing~~ snake and remaining above water only long enough to cry. As I could not see the little elephant's body, it was ~~ver~~ y difficult to spot him.

Up to that moment I had no idea that an elephant baby could scream so loudly but, once Bukhari had pointed him out to me, nothing could hold me back. Quickly grabbing the rope that Bukhari had brought with him, I stood up to my neck in the water and, pushing the brown islands away from my face, worked my way towards the little animal, despite Bukhari's violent protests. I must have covered about fifteen to twenty feet when, for the second time that morning, I landed in an elephant hell. But this time I could see the

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

giant beast clearly, as she was not hidden by the reeds. We stood face to face!

For four years I have worked in close contact with wild elephants and I must have survived more than a hundred encounters, many of them far more dangerous than this one, but none of them remains so clearly in my memory. On the basis of this first experience with Lake Chad elephants, I drew my conclusions and planned my future course of action. During this second attack I was in complete control of myself and, although my behaviour was spontaneous, I knew exactly what I was doing, probably because this time I could see my attacker. But in spite of this my efforts would have availed me little if Bukhari had not cried out at the right moment.

Even to-day I can still hear Bukhari's cry of terror ringing in my ears. This scream which saved me almost cost him his life. In coming years I was to hear that same cry from Bukhari and from the other boys, that one word, '*komoon*', screamed at me in tones of mortal fear.

The elephant cow was standing at the edge of the high reed barrier, only twenty-five feet away from me. When I had waded fifteen feet into the open water, she saw me and at once prepared to charge. With her gigantic ears fanning out at right angles and stiff as boards, her trunk held high and pointing straight upwards ready to deal the decisive blow, she rushed towards me at a gallop, churning up the water like a destroyer. In the midst of this came Bukhari's warning cry. The cow stopped short twelve feet from me; there was a terrifying second-long silence – then she slowly turned her head and, holding her trunk in the

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

direction of the sound, she was off again, a wild, dark grey mountain of rage and destruction, charging straight at poor Bukhari, whose head I had seen only a second ago but which had now disappeared.

Bukhari, also, got away with a good scare. He ducked under water to escape the cow and she rushed past him. After that, she came tearing back in my direction. Moved by curiosity, I had raised my head above water to watch the enraged animal, so she discovered me for the second time. However, in these few seconds I had learned a lot. I dived under water and swam out of range. When I could hear nothing more, I rose to the surface. The cow was no longer there.

Through the sudden morning silence came the pitiful crying of the baby elephant, calling at regular intervals for his mother. I looked for the rope, which I had lost during the attack, and when I found it I waded over to the little elephant, peering around cautiously to make sure that the mother really had gone away. Bukhari was now his old self again, and he came quickly and followed me, so that both of us arrived at the little elephant's side at almost the same moment.

The baby welcomed me joyfully, and I had a lot of trouble staying on my feet. He followed me willingly, nuzzling at my back with his trunk and sticking so close to my heels that strips of skin were torn off by his horny toes. But in my joy at having caught my first Lake Chad elephant I didn't even notice it.

Elephant children are like other animal children. Helpless and ignorant, they cling to the first living creature that comes their way, and for this reason our homeward march presented no difficulties. I had only

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

one fear now and that nagged constantly at my nerves: Where was that cow? Any minute I expected her to attack us, for I knew enough about elephants to be sure she would fight for her child with her life.

Bukhari II, who had lived through similar experiences and had barely escaped with his life, for some strange reason was not in the least worried. As far as he was concerned, the whole adventure might never have taken place and he seemed sure that there would be no repercussions. It surprised me to see how this child of nature could digest a dangerous ordeal of this kind with no apparent after-effects. When I asked him several times to help me watch for the mother elephant, I got as answer, '*Komoon bau*'. And Bukhari was right. We emerged unmolested from the Chad between four and five o'clock and reached the neighbouring forest where the rest of our party was encamped.

I immediately gave the order to break camp and to set up our night's headquarters in a more open spot. I ordered no fires to be lighted that evening, a command which was received most ungraciously by my boys. I gave this order because I did not wish to be blinded by a bright fire. But that did not seem to bother my men. I have never been able to discover whether natives see, hear, or smell the approach of danger, but I know from experience that all of them can sense trouble sneaking up on them much earlier than a white man can.

I was sure of one thing: the cow never would give up her child so easily. I was, however, completely in the dark as to when and how the attack would come. Meanwhile, I tied the baby elephant to a tree and climbed a giant acacia about a hundred and fifty feet

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

away from him. This was not to protect myself from attack, but in order to have a better view. I do not recommend tree climbing to anyone who is trying to hide from an elephant.

Hour after hour passed in nerve-racking suspense, but not a thing happened. Huddled inside their cloaks, my boys squatted on the ground, freezing and grumbling. It must have been long past midnight. The baby elephant had cried himself hoarse and now his plaintive wails, repeated at regular intervals, were growing weaker. The young animal could not bear to be alone; he was still a baby crying for his mother, for some living being to whom he could cling.

In spite of his pitiful wailing, I was forced to harden my heart. I had to use my reason instead of my emotions, and my reason told me that I must not risk a man's life to stop the elephant baby's crying. I dared not allow any of my boys to watch beside him, for the darkness of the night would have made it impossible to see the mother in time should she decide on sudden attack.

For this reason alone, it was impossible to think of returning to our base camp that night. So as not to risk human lives unnecessarily, I had arranged our camp in such a way that the baby elephant was a hundred yards away from my boys and about one hundred and fifty yards away from me. Sitting up in my tree, and closing my strained eyes for seconds at a time in order to rest them, I decided I had done everything within my power to ensure a maximum of safety.

Two o'clock. It must certainly be two o'clock. Would the cow come? If only I could have answered that question! 'Things can't go on like this,' I said to

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

myself. 'In two hours we must set off and I will have to let the boys light fires to thaw out their frozen bodies.'

I whistled. Ibrahim had just answered me with the high, shrill, hyenalike call which was customary in the locality when suddenly the night turned into a roaring crashing hell. The tree in which I was sitting, blissfully unawares, crashed down with me. I was hurled through the air for a good five yards and landed in some thorn bushes. Without taking inventory of my limbs, I knew I had landed safely, for I could still run, run for my life through the thorn bushes which stripped the leather clothes from my body. Although the thorns tore big wounds in my flesh, I didn't even notice it at the time.

It was not until later that I noticed the wounds and felt any pain. At the time, I was anaesthetized by fear. It is no exaggeration to say that this maddened elephant mother, fighting for her child with unbounded rage, shook the ground like a minor earthquake. That night, a six-ton mass of wild, rampaging flesh tore down fourteen tough acacia giants, each one two feet thick, and trampled them to small stumps practically level with the ground, not to mention another fifty trees of assorted sizes. An elephant cow needs only a few minutes to accomplish such terrifying devastation.

course of the next year, I was to be hurled out of another four times by night, and once by day.

en this hellish commotion was over, I found myself riding in the bushes, trembling from head to foot, my heart pounding like a sledge hammer. I am not in the least ashamed to confess that after this attack over it took me a good hour to stop my hands shaking.





## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

One after another, my boys, who had scattered, found their way back. It was strange not to be able to recognize any of them by their voices. I had to look closely at each of them to see who was talking to me, for their voices had become thin and frightened. Even I was unable to speak in my usual voice.

Through the silence came the weakened, hoarse wails of the baby elephant, calling for his mother like a human child that has cried itself tired.

The always inarticulate Colo went to pacify the baby elephant. I didn't stop him as, for the moment, there seemed little chance that the mother would return. After expending so much energy, she would need at least a few hours in which to recover. In her blind rage she had stormed past her child. As soon as Colo went up to him, the baby calmed down.

I ordered Bikhari II to take my stallion and ride to the next village as quickly as possible and drive back two cows for us. After Bikhari had left, we set off with the baby elephant. I walked at the end of the line, a hundred yards or so behind the others, for I expected the elephant mother's next attack to come from the rear, since we were always marching against the wind.

The baby elephant ran along beautifully at Colo's side trailing him so closely that his horny toes tore the skin off the long-suffering boy's heels until they bled, just as he had done with me the day before. Colo accepted this philosophically. Whenever the elephant trod on his heels especially hard, Colo would bend forward a little, open his lips almost imperceptibly, and catch his breath noisily between set teeth. I knew by this just how badly the elephant was hurting him.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

Even when Colo held one arm behind his back, to keep the young animal at a distance, the situation did not improve. Again and again, the little fellow tried to nurse at Colo's body, just as he had been used to nursing at his mother's.

To prevent this constant crowding, which no human being could endure for any length of time, I had put a rope around the baby's neck which the man who followed him had to pull whenever he saw the little fellow pushing too close against Colo in his efforts to nurse. This seemed to work well, except that, after an hour, the baby's tender, velvet-soft skin was rubbed raw and we could see a large, bleeding wound. To meet this new crisis, I tore a blanket into strips and laid them under the rope like a cushion. At last everything was all right.

I worried terribly about a suspicious, fresh single track which we kept crossing from time to time. I knew it must belong to the cow, but I didn't know how to explain the fact that the tracks were in front of us. Under these conditions it would be impossible for the cow to smell us or even to hear the slightest sound, as we were all walking in the soft sand.

The cow must certainly be close to us, and her presence was no accident! She must know that we were marching with her child. What sense enabled that cow to discover her child's whereabouts if she could not smell or hear us? We crossed the tracks again. I could not stand it any longer, waiting like this to be trampled to death, especially as we were now walking through grass nine feet high, bounded on the left by a forest, so that I could not see for more than twelve feet in any direction.

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

The drama of the previous day, in its setting of reeds and water, followed by the night of horror and twenty-four hours without a single minute's sleep, had shattered my nerves. And still the end was not in sight.

My body was trembling and chilled with shock and my hands shook so badly that I was unable to fill or light my reserve pipe, the important thing I owned. I let Ali do it for me. The desire to lie down and sleep was so intense that I had to summon up all my will power to fight it. Somehow, the situation must resolve itself and come to an end. I decided to follow the tracks. Holding my bamboo club firmly in my right hand, I tried to follow the tracks at a jog trot, hoping to settle my account with the elephant cow. If only I could have talked things over sensibly with her instead of resorting to a gun. If I shot every elephant mother who fought for her child with her life, where would I be? I swore to myself that I would never take up my gun to rid myself of this cowardly fear for my own life.

I ran slowly through the high grass, keeping to the elephant track as if it were a path which would lead me toward the thick, spreading forest.

I reached the first trees. In their shade the grass began to be shorter. Suddenly, I stood beside a dark grey rock, twelve feet high. I could not explain its presence; it seemed unearthly, as if it had been conjured up by magic. But it was no hallucination. It was the cow, the mother of the child.

She stood like a statue, frozen to stone. Not even her eyes betrayed life. The earth which meant life to me seemed very far away and unattainable. I wondered whether a man had ever stood like this before, face to

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

face in the wilderness with a mother elephant. Her eyes were uncanny, fixed and empty, completely white and devoid of life, as if their gaze were turned inward. The elephant mother had actually been driven into a kind of melancholy madness by her grief at losing her child.

She did not even know that the man who had kidnapped her child, her only enemy, was standing before her. She need only have lifted her mighty trunk and let it swoop downwards and the kidnapping of her baby would have been avenged.

I prodded her trunk lightly with my bamboo staff. Like two barn doors, her flapping ears stood out at right angles to her body. Slowly she raised her trunk and lifted it toward my advancing men, then, with a few deep, sorrowful sounds, she turned, as slowly as before, and moved away.

I went back to my boys and, yielding to my utter exhaustion, allowed them to halt under a shady tree. Drained of all strength, I lay down in the sand. Although the rest was a blessed relief, I was unable to sleep, try as I might, for a feverish inner excitement kept me wide awake. Not so my native boys. They dropped down and snored immediately. Only Bukhari II and Colo stayed with the baby elephant to keep him company so that he would be quiet and not cry. Our rest was to last only a short while, however, for the idyllic quiet was rudely broken by Bukhari's cry of fear which sounded just like the one I had heard the day before at Lake Chad. In an instant all my boys had disappeared.

Even Bukhari and Colo who had been watching beside the baby elephant, had run away. The elephant

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

child tried to run after them, but they ran too fast and he could not keep up. I hurried to take charge of the young beast to prevent him from screaming, for his cries would certainly have driven his mother to action. Then I saw her walking by only sixty feet from where I stood. Again we got away with just a scare!

A further march was out of the question. It was already too late, the sun had attained its full power, and elephants detest heat. At this time they settle themselves in the deep shade and doze. And young elephants suffer from the heat most of all – so much so that if you expose them to the full heat of the sun you can kill them.

The rest of the day was uneventful. The elephant child ran about freely among us as we rested, wandering from one to the other. Shaking his body angrily, as if he wanted to rid himself of annoying insects, and growling deeply, he ran through a strip of light which slanted down between the trees. Often he lacked the courage to run through and then he would turn back, grumbling some more. Soon my boys noticed the baby's phobia. Young elephants have the unpleasant habit of climbing up on you and trampling around on your body, so, in order not to be molested by the calf, my boys selected their resting places in such a way that a broad patch of sunlight lay between them and the young elephant.

Again it was the frighteningly ugly Colo, that sincere animal lover, who, with self-sacrifice and true devotion, took pity on the little fellow. It was high time, for more and more urgently the baby demanded his feeding. We milked one of the cows brought up from a near-by village and fed the baby the milk in a gourd.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

He drank about two quarts at intervals of two or three hours, welcoming his 'bottle' eagerly and gulping its contents down greedily. After a two-hour rest, I was awakened by terrified screams of '*Komoon*'. Below us, the hamlet emptied in an instant; not a soul remained. From the distance came the wailing of men, women, and children and the barking of dogs who had fled with their masters.

Keeping close watch, I went slowly down to the hamlet. The dry, wooden frameworks which supported the straw thatching of the huts were breaking. I could hear it plainly. A giant, dark grey ghost was racing through the village. The whole rampage lasted only thirty or forty seconds, then the people and the dogs returned. But, in spite of the fact that I paid them twice what the huts were worth, the natives did not stop their wailing and complaining. The white man had brought misfortune upon them, he had taken the elephant mother's child, now she would come and kill everybody.

The ghost haunted the village for another four nights, then the elephant mother never came again. There was no loss of life; she did not revenge herself on the human species.

Nine days later my baby elephant died. After that there was no more turning back for me. I had to know what had caused his death.

This first hunt made me realize that close contact with elephants, as I had experienced it at Lake Chad, could only mean that my chances of escaping with my life were very slim indeed. But I was unwilling to go home empty-handed, so I could do nothing to help the situation. I was more determined than ever to bring

## MY FIRST ELEPHANT

the first Lake Chad elephant home to Europe alive. In the course of the next four years I caught nineteen baby elephants, not to mention the many I released immediately after I caught them because they were only a few days or weeks old.

Since all my nineteen baby elephants died, my four years of work at Lake Chad might be considered a complete loss. In the last chapter we will see whether this is true.

## THE HERD LIFE OF THE CHAD ELEPHANTS

AT THIS POINT I should like to repeat the remark of an American explorer: 'We have known the elephant for a thousand years, yet we know practically nothing about him.' There is little to add to these words, for the restless pachyderm keeps his secrets well. The elephant is the most difficult of all mammals to observe, especially in his herd life.

What do you gain if, aided by chance, you succeed in watching the elephants from your hiding place as they wallow in the mire? You are overwhelmed by myriad sensations, you see a thousand different details, you even see elephant ghosts – and each time you look you get a different impression!

There are good reasons why it is impossible for us to observe the elephant in daily life. The most difficult undertaking is to travel with the herd for purposes of observation. By this I don't mean following in their tracks until you are exhausted, but remaining with the herd and travelling with it in such a way that the elephants are never out of your sight. I do not believe that anyone has succeeded in doing this. Nor do I believe that this will ever be possible in the full sense of the words. I, myself, succeeded only for a period of four consecutive days and nights, at the most. Many riddles remain to be solved and some of them, I feel, will never be understood by the human mind. At times, for instance, an elephant herd seems only a phantom, while at other times it is only too palpable.

## THE HERD LIFE

This may sound unbelievable and yet it is the absolute truth. I will explain what I mean by this so that no one will get the idea that I believe in ghosts or see visions.

One day a big elephant herd was standing only a hundred and fifty yards away from me. I couldn't see them, probably because they were in the high swamp grass or in deep water. But the whole atmosphere was terrifying and oppressive, charged with the trumpeting and screaming of elephants. I was not satisfied just to hear them. I needed to know how far away they were from me, for the human sense of hearing can be very deceptive.

In order to see farther I climbed a tree. Suddenly, the air went dead. It was uncanny; I hardly dared to breathe. The silence was that of the tomb. Cautiously, I went on climbing. At last I could survey the wide spaces ahead of me. There was not an elephant to be seen. Two hundred giant elephants had disappeared as if they were ghosts.

I had an even more devastating experience when, on climbing a hill, I actually had the herd before my eyes for quite some time. When I had made my plans and proceeded to execute them, I was able to find the place where the herd had been but the herd itself had vanished. Not a single elephant remained. I had seen them and heard them, but somehow either my senses or the elephants had tricked me. This is why I speak of ghosts.

The herd wanders restlessly hither and thither, seemingly without a definite goal, with no set purpose. For the pursuer this is irritating in the extreme. Time after time, he follows the fresh spoor. He believes that,

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

at last – in just a minute – he will catch up with the herd. Although all the signs seemed to point to the presence of a herd, it is only fantasy. At night, he sinks down exhausted. ‘To-morrow I will catch up with the herd’, he tells himself. But neither the next day, nor the next, brings him the fulfilment of his dreams. Sometimes weeks pass with only a fleeting vision. The hunter has not found the herd; it is the other way round: the herd has found him and then, quickly, surprisingly, the elephants appear again, only to disappear once more, like ghosts. This ability to appear and disappear when least expected is probably the greatest defence weapon that the elephant possesses.

The elephant is by no means a nervous animal. Might we suspect that behind this seemingly aimless wandering there lies a definite purpose? Is the elephant by this device trying to trick and exhaust his only enemy, man?

In order to seek the answers to this question, a man must spend a year travelling with a herd. When he has done that he will be able to predict almost all their moves. For the herd's wanderings are motivated by a desire for rich pasturage, and the destination is reached in the most roundabout way.

One might say that a herd moves at three different speeds, not counting a fourth, which isolated animals adopt under certain conditions.

The first speed is when they meander in search of food. Singly or in groups, the herd ambles along aimlessly at a rate of one to two miles an hour, travelling by night, for that is their principal feeding time.

In the second instance, the elephants march at a brisk pace, covering about four miles an hour.

## THE HERD LIFE

In the third instance, the elephants move at a rate of nine to ten miles an hour. This is a defence measure which the herd adopts when it senses that the arch-enemy, man, is close at hand or when the herd sentinels give warning of his approach.

In this event the elephants do not stop to think but escape in forced marches. For those giants are intelligent enough to know that where man is there is the end of all hope of peace and harmony.

The herd can keep up this pace for distances of thirty to ninety miles. Their rests are short, and even during these respites the elephants stand with strained, flapping ears, trunks raised high in the air like receiving antennæ, alert for any smell of man in the atmosphere. At this time, there is a quiet whispering, a droning consultation which you can only hear if you are near by. Then they move off again at the double, often in a totally different direction.

At this speed there is none of that aimless wandering which is so irritating to the hunter. Now their only wish is to put as great a distance as possible between themselves and their pursuer. It is only when they are close to their goal that they relapse into tempo number two. But there is no use trying to fit elephant behaviour into any hard-and-fast rule. This great beast has an intelligence that is almost human, and he is capable of adopting a plan of action to ensure his safety. Only his speed of travel fits into a pattern, but in flight the actions of an elephant are often incalculable.

Therefore, you can never predict when and for how long a herd will take to flight. Perhaps after only a mile it will find a place where it can settle down unseen. Once the elephants lured me into an ambush of

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

this sort, and all at once they came out like an unleashed whirlwind and attacked.

You must never forget that when you are sure the elephants have retreated and you settle down to watch them, the whole herd may suddenly charge. It has trapped you in an ambush!

The lone elephant may adopt a fourth tactic that is completely unpredictable – the attack in the water. Mad with rage, he comes straight at you, but this heedless assault is much less dangerous than the more reasoned attack executed by the herd in quick-march tempo.

One good thing about this mad charge is that it completely exhausts the animal, and although I have lived through many such experiences I have rarely seen an animal rally for a second charge. By jumping quickly to one side, I have always managed to outwit my assailant, who is apt to rush past, missing his objective by as much as ten to twenty yards. If by some fluke there should be a second round, you always have time to take the necessary measures for your safety. In contrast to the headlong assault, the less spectacular attack at the double can be repeated as often as four times.

But an elephant's life is not all war; he also has his quiet hours. At two o'clock in the afternoon the papyrus swamp comes to life. Two great, sleepy giants plough slowly through the narrow entrances into the adjacent sea of reeds. Other elephants follow. Often it takes an hour before the whole herd has gathered.

Until now the sentries, completely hidden in the deep, reed-covered water, have been patrolling in wide circles on the outskirts of the herd, protecting the huge

## THE HERD LIFE

family from surprise attacks during their two-hour siesta. Now they go off in all directions, encircling the herd, all the time patrolling both in front and behind the moving animals. Sometimes there are as many as six sentries on duty at the same time.

The herd saunters but it stays close together. In the afternoon hours you hear no quarrelling among the various families; the elephants browse as they range. With their trunks, they probe the bottom of the water, tearing up big bundles of reeds, root and all. They are after the succulent reed-marrow, which is more tender the closer it is to the ground.

Moving slowly ahead, the elephants make many detours as they head for the shore, but they never lose sight of the feeding grounds which are their ultimate goal. If necessary, they will swim through the larger lakes, some of them as big as a thousand to three thousand square yards. It is a wonderful sight to see two hundred elephants, old and young, diving and swimming with great elegance, only the tops of their big heads showing above the water. I was often unable to follow them and had to take such a roundabout route that my chase was interrupted for the rest of the day.

It is hard to become accustomed to the deafening noise made by the breaking and crushing of great masses of tough reeds and the rush of masses of water displaced by two hundred elephants. Nowhere else have I ever felt such an oppressive sensation of fear, neither on the veld nor in the dense forest. My senses were whipped to a high pitch by this diabolical elephant orchestra, and in this state of feverish excitement I could travel with the herd for days at a stretch

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

without tiring. As a matter of fact, this was not the time to relax one's caution, for without any warning, a couple of living, grey mountains might suddenly pass only an arm's-stretch away. Added to this there was always the danger of a surprise attack by some solitary animal watching on the fringe of the herd.

A throaty, jerky barking mingles with the trumpeting of the elephants. It sounds like deep, loud laughter – and you know that a hippopotamus is screaming at the elephants. He does not relish having his sleep disturbed. Good-naturedly, peaceably, the herd turns aside, and in this way elephant and hippopotamus live side by side on the best of terms. The hippopotami often screamed at me, too, always waiting till the last moment, when I was only a yard or two away from them, often in deep water. At first I was frightened, but soon I got so accustomed to the lazy animals that I would scream right back at them, 'Shut your big mouths!'

Only very seldom, in the afternoon, when the herd saunters back toward the shore, do you hear the trumpeting of a single elephant. At that time of day, it can mean only one thing: a young bull, enticed by some infatuated female, has made a mistake in the hour. No sooner has he embraced his lady-love tenderly than an old bull catches him at his brazen, daytime love-making. For a wild elephant seldom makes love during the day, and such behaviour is considered shameless by the herd. After such a lapse, a thunderous scream of reprobation can be heard for miles around. There is no animal on earth that can match the elephant when it comes to lung power.

Just before dark, life in the elephant family begins

## THE HERD LIFE

to get more lively. Hours before, I have left for the lake shore to get a few hours' sleep. Lying on the ground, on a native mat, I listen to the elephant chorus. It is almost six o'clock. I still have plenty of time, as the elephants will not return to the shore before the middle of the night.

Just before sunset you may hear a nursing cry. It takes long experience to recognize this loud scream as the wail of a baby. I should hate to give the experts a test on this point out in the field; many of them would certainly fail. For a baby elephant, only a few weeks old, already has the lung capacity of an adult animal. Usually the cow will not worry if her child cries; like a human mother, she believes that a baby must exercise his lungs. In any case, it is not yet nursing-time.

Out on the veld it is still as light as day. It is nights such as these that make the following of an elephant herd an unforgettable delight.

The herd feels safe at last. It knows that its great enemy, man, sleeps at night and that, in addition, he is helpless in the dark. The elephants wander slowly, peaceful and undisturbed.

An hour after sunset, however, the elephant becomes a different animal. His face, his whole character has changed. When night falls, he becomes aggressive, and it was then that he taught me how to run. This ignominious situation grew worse with each month. I had been with the herd too long. The elephants knew my voice, my scent, they knew everything about me, so that now our relationship was reversed: they had been the hunters and I the hunted.

With nightfall, the family life of the elephant really begins. The herd meets in council. There is a choice of

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

two, three, or even four feeding grounds and a decision must be reached on the night's objective. Groups separate from the main herd, scattering near and far. The air is filled with the drone of their trumpeting. Some of the elephants want to go where the sweet corn is to be found, others prefer a near-by pumpkin field, while still others long for beans or thick, red millet.

The herd comes closer and closer to our camp. At night the noise they make seems more eerie than by day. My boys pack up. They roll their mats together, hoist the light loads on to their heads, and march off. That is all there is to it. Often the meat they are roasting over the embers is not yet done. No matter; they throw the big chunks right into the flames, where they quickly char. They take them off it, peel off the scorched part, scrape off the ashes and move away, eating as they go. At first I used to leave with them, but after an experience which was so strange that I still can't understand it, I stayed where I was.

One night I had camped on a dunelike elevation near a hamlet which was right in the middle of the elephant country. This spot was so located that the elephants had to pass it, whether they came from north or south.

I had recently come back to camp with a new baby elephant, and I had taken full charge of him. After a fortnight the baby died. The death of the elephant babies haunted me even in my sleep. I would often wake up after a nightmare having to do with fear. On this night it seemed to me that all the elephant mothers in the world were circling around my bed with the sole purpose of getting themselves on me. But this was a





## THE HERD LIFE

conjured up by my overwrought nerves – this was real! A herd of a hundred and twenty elephants split into two columns as if on parade filed past me at a distance of six feet from either side of my bed, then marched through the narrow lanes of the village, which had been promptly evacuated by its twenty inhabitants.

An English officer arrived the next day to shoot an elephant. He called on me and the natives showed him the place where I had been lying the night before and the prints which the elephant feet had made in the soft sand. So I had a witness to my weird adventure.

After this incident I always lay perfectly still, even in the midst of the most hellish noise, although Bukhari would wake me in terror. I have no explanation for this extraordinary action on the part of the elephants, and it was all the more strange as it was in complete contradiction to their usual aggressive night-time behaviour.

Usually the elephants follow a definite routine which varies little from night to night. The great event of the early night hours is the council. Almost two hundred elephants, the combined big and little herds, go into a huddle to make their plans. From time to time the consultation is interrupted by the crying of a baby who wants to be nursed. But the elders have empty stomachs themselves, and the mothers turn a deaf ear to the infant wailing.

By this time it is ten or eleven o'clock and the elephants have still not come to an agreement. A few groups have left the council, and you can hear their trumpetings coming from far and near. Every now and again one of the groups rejoins the main herd. Sud-

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

denly, there is peace: a decision has been reached. Now there is only one sound to be heard, the deep stomach tones of the Lake Chad elephant orchestra mingling with the loud snapping of the last reeds. As the elephants step on land you hear the soft rushing of shallow water. Now and then a cow stops to nurse her calf and the nurslings are quiet at last. The great, shadowy avalanche rolls past me at a marching speed of four to five miles an hour.

These nights spent alone with the elephants left an unforgettable impression on me. A man must, however, be careful not to shoot or make any other noise that will attract the attention of the elephants. For the great, hungry beasts are anything but pleasant companions when they are on the march to their feeding grounds. However, they never attack a human being while he is asleep. The elephant is an extremely decent animal, more decent than a human being, and it does not seem very important to me whether this results from conscious effort or from instinct.

The herd has arrived at last at a giant water-hole full of ripening pumpkins. Deploying like a company of soldiers and making no sound, the herd breaks up at the water hole and moves off in small groups.

The pumpkin is a wonderful fruit. Stored in a shady place, it will keep till the next harvest. For this reason the natives raise a crop that is large enough to last through the winter. They eat the pumpkins raw or roasted in the embers, and in this country, where vegetables are rare, the pumpkin serves as the principal vegetable.

There are many big water holes near Lake Chad, and it is in this fertile ground that the natives plant the

## THE HERD LIFE

orange-coloured fruit. Frequently, however, the herd relieves them of the trouble of harvesting the crop, for to elephants a pumpkin is the greatest delicacy.

The elephants set their feet firmly down on the hard fruit. The first pumpkins crack and the big trunks feel at the broken pieces, select small morsels, and shove them into their mouths. The work of crushing the pumpkin and picking up the pieces is accomplished on the move. The giants amble forward slowly, then the next pumpkins crack – and so on and on at a restless tempo. Sometimes the pumpkins are hidden between the cotton bushes, and in that case the bushes are demolished along with the fruit.

Such a visit by an elephant herd may cost a large village an entire year's harvest in a single night . . . in a single hour. But these Allah-worshippers never wail or complain, for their religion gives them faith, comfort, and endless patience. When a Mohammedan discovers that the damage done to his crops is an actual fact, he bows his forehead to the ground and, with one deep groaning 'Allah', liquidates his sorrow.

Before travelling any further with the elephants, I should like to say a few words in their defence. When you look at a field of pumpkins that has been destroyed, you are tempted to call the elephant a vandal. And yet, that is not right. Unfortunately, the law permits the shooting of elephants who trespass on cultivated land. In itself, this law is not objectionable, but the trouble lies in the way the individual (and that means the European, since the native doesn't own any serviceable weapons) abuses this one remaining legal loophole for his own purposes. He wants to be able to boast that he has shot an elephant, and because of this

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

the elephant has been practically exterminated in the coastal regions of West Africa.

The white planters of this area often greatly exaggerate the damage done to their crops by an elephant herd. These distorted complaints are filed with the sole idea of obtaining permission to shoot off the last remaining animals. But as the planters have no basis of comparison for their accusations, their judgment is a completely one-sided one. They should try to be a little more just and a little more truthful. A monsoon can demolish fifty thousand bushes in half an hour, while the elephants may destroy two dozen bushes in the course of a whole year. A single warning shot would suffice to prevent the herd from coming back for six months or even a year.

By nature the African elephant is a restless wanderer. But the elephant who inhabits the coastal forest takes, on the average, four times as much time to traverse a given stretch as his cousin of the reed veld. The explanation for this is that the coastal elephant is not driven by insects and flies. In comparison with the coastal regions, the reed veld country breeds an unimaginable variety of blood-sucking insects. To escape this plague, the reed veld elephant must roam; he must keep on going through grass, bush, reed, and water. The only salvation for men and animals is to keep moving.

At the end of the rainy season almost all the adult elephants suffer from huge sores (more than a hand's breadth in width and an inch deep) caused by the flies which swarm about them in clouds at this time. These wounds are found only in the soft, thin skin of the belly and are infested with maggots, for at this period of the

## THE HERD LIFE

year the bellies of the elephants do not quite touch the water level. During October, November, and December, when Lake Chad is at high water, the wounds heal completely.

But to get back to the elephant family. It takes the herd less than an hour to demolish almost a square mile of pumpkins. When the elephants have had their fill, they move off, just as silently as they came. The command to march is heard even by the groups farthest away, although it is inaudible to the human ear.

Now the baby elephants are nursed, both willingly and plentifully. When her own hunger is satisfied, the mother elephant is in a good humour and at this time her baby need only give one gentle hint of a cry to make her stand still at once and feed him. To nurse, the little elephant shoves himself under his mother's breast. The very young baby who is still too small to reach the teats braces his feet against his mother's legs and, propped up in this way, works himself into position, assisted by his mother, who supports him with her trunk.

Suddenly I see a dark grey mound lying right in front of me. I peer at it closely. It looks like a dead young elephant. The first time this happened to me it was night and the animal lay so completely immobile that I was convinced he was dead. His legs and trunk were stretched straight out in front of him and his body was absolutely limp. I took hold of the calf and lifted up his leg. Lifeless, it dropped back on to the ground. That really seemed too strange, and I examined the young animal from head to toe: no wounds, no injuries of any kind.

All at once the dead child raised his head and, as if

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

someone had given him an electric shock, scrambled to his feet. Immediately he was fresh and active and began at once to feel about him with his trunk, touching at everything that lay within his reach, including me! When elephants are very small, they are delighted to meet any living creature to whom they can cling, but as they grow older they become less friendly; then they shake their heads, trumpet loudly, and run away. This might seem like a good chance to catch a young elephant, but it is not quite so easy as that. Once the natives had the same idea and they had to pay for it with their lives. It is owing to just this sort of experience that the maxim has been handed down from generation to generation: 'If you rob an elephant mother of her child, she will come and kill all of you.'

If you could simply grab a sleeping elephant baby by his neck as if he were a snake and stuff him quickly into your bag, all would be well. But that is not possible. For one thing, the mother elephant is usually close at hand, and on a dark night it is very easy for her to take you by surprise. When a tired baby elephant throws himself down on the ground to rest, as a rule his mother does not desert him. She does not try to wake him, for she knows that cannot be done, but, patient and alert, she stands by, guarding his sleep, watching over him until he wakes. I have come upon these slumbering babies on many occasions, though I have never yet seen an adult elephant sleeping out in the open.

As soon as elephant babies are big enough, they are accustomed to stand in as much as five feet of water for eighteen to twenty-four hours a day without a

## THE HERD LIFE

single opportunity to rest. Furthermore, among wild elephants it is the child's responsibility to see that he does not lose his mother; among all the other high mammals it is the mother who takes the responsibility for her child. I know of one case of a mother who left her child before sunrise and only came back out of the lake at eleven o'clock to retrieve her screaming offspring. It is not at all unusual for a mother elephant to leave her child for two or three hours at a time. It is easy to understand why, after standing for eighteen hours in the deep water of Lake Chad, followed by a gruelling night march during which there is no chance of resting even for a moment, the baby elephants drop down exhausted in a deathlike sleep which may last thirty minutes or more.

The herd moves on with no set formation, a picture of confusion. Like giant ghosts, the grey mountains travel across the moonlit veld. Around two o'clock in the morning they may stop again to take in a field of corn, a dessert that is delicious to these gourmets. Their trunks hug big bundles of cobs, letting most of them fall back on to the ground. They like to chew on a cob that is especially sweet. After twenty minutes the whole field has been reduced to a few stumps, but the loss is not too great. In any case, the natives have been spared some work: the elephants have relieved them of the trouble of cutting down the hard stalks, and all that needs to be done now is to remove the stumps.

The grey avalanche moves majestically through the dark night, pushing forward restlessly. The herd is now heading for Lake Chad. As they enter the forest their dark grey contours melt so deceptively into the dark tree columns that unless you knew an elephant herd

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

was approaching, you would think it was the forest itself.

By now it is almost three o'clock. This is a time for redoubled vigilance, for when elephants have fed and have had an hour's walk to stimulate their digestion, the herd enters on a new phase of life.

Up to this time, the night silence has been broken only by the crying of calves, but now a thunderous rolling trumpeting can be heard. When I hear that cry, which seems to shatter the air, I know that the drive for existence, the very sense and meaning of life, is about to fulfil itself among the elephants. The time for procreation has come.

### *The Love Life of the Elephants*

In the accepted sense of the word, the night march of the elephants is over. The great beasts are scattered over a wide distance and it is no longer possible to find the centre of the herd. Moving along with the elephants has now become almost impossible. You literally cannot avoid running under their feet at this point, which makes an observer's life an arduous one.

It was during these nights that I learned how to run – to run for my life. Often I felt as if I were hemmed in completely by the herd. No matter in which direction I fled, I almost ran under the feet of another giant beast. It was always a mystery to me the next morning that I had managed to survive a night of this kind.

There in the faint moonlight which shines down through a clump of widely spaced trees stand a pair of lovers, lost to the world. It is a grandiose sight. This is no hasty mating, over and done with in a minute or two, this is ardent love-making, preceded by a long

## THE HERD LIFE

courtship. Like human beings, these great beasts kiss and embrace tenderly.

With their powerful trunks, which they use like human arms, they embrace one another fondly, their huge bulky heads pressed close together as their mouths search and find each other to be joined at last in a long, yearning kiss. Again and again, they embrace, touching each other gently with their padded tongues, kissing each other in an ecstasy of love.

This idyll is interrupted by a loud crashing noise. Branches and trees are broken. An elderly male – I see him only dimly and am just able to get out of his way – lurches madly through the forest, screaming with rage. Rejected by his lady-love, he hurls himself against a tree and reduces it to a stump in a frantic effort to recover his inner equilibrium. On every side you hear twigs and branches snap, for there are also feeding animals about.

This commotion does not disturb the lovers. In the intoxication of their senses, they are oblivious to everything around them. Time passes quickly.

The coming of the young day warns them that they must part, and, sobered, they run at a trot to join the herd, which has, in the meanwhile, collected itself. A love affair of this kind may last for days or even weeks. But that is not always the way elephants love. A female may not always select the same male for her love-making and vice versa.

The herd is gathered at last on the shore of Lake Chad. In long columns, it plunges into the reeds. Once more the Lake Chad orchestra strikes up. There is the same old music, the furore and the trumpeting, the breaking of the hard reeds, the rushing of water, all

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

the many sounds that are unforgettable to one who has once heard them.

At the first stretch of open water the elephants pause to refresh themselves with the first delicious drink of the morning. Then they are off again, sauntering at a leisurely pace, wandering up and down among the reeds. They graze here, too, mostly on reed-marrow and quick-grass, swimming through deep water whenever that seems necessary. Only the cows and the smallest calves stay behind; they go off by themselves, hiding so successfully in the high reeds that they cannot be seen by the human eye. Every herd has two to four cows with small calves.

Once more the elephants have arrived at their goal, and now they push forward into the papyrus swamp, settling down among its quiet inlets to rest and recuperate. On the outskirts of the herd, the sentinels are once more on duty, patrolling faithfully so that the herd may enjoy a few quiet hours.

### *The Sentries*

Wherever it may happen to be, the herd posts its sentries at dawn. At Lake Chad I only once caught the elephants unguarded and that was at the southern labyrinth which I have already described. When I came upon them in this retreat, I accepted it as proof that for once they believed they had found a spot that was safe.

My long pursuit of the elephants must certainly have made them more than usually watchful, for in no other region did I ever come across such an elaborate sentry system. In time they developed their sentinel technique to such a point that these watchmen formed

## THE HERD LIFE

an unbroken chain around the herd and it was quite impossible for me to take the elephants by surprise.

I do not believe that other hunters have recognized these outposts for what they are. I am perfectly willing to confess that when I first saw these lone elephants wandering about I mistook them for rogues and shot them.

These elephant sentinels are always where you least expect to see them. Suddenly, you feel the trunk of one of them at the back of your neck. A hunter does not follow the fresh tracks of an elephant herd for only a few days; he follows them for weeks at a time. The foot-high, cylindrical mounds of droppings give off a pungent smell of elephant and this proof of the closeness of his quarry has such a vitalizing effect on a hunter that it eggs even a tired man on to feverish haste.

Finally, the elephant tires of this constant pursuit and quite unexpectedly the hunter feels the trunk of a sentinel at his neck. 'Thank heaven,' the hunter sighs when once more he has escaped with his life, 'that went off all right.' He is convinced that his assailant was a rogue elephant, but it was no rogue, it was a patrolling sentry.

An hour after sunset the sentinels go off duty. Night is the time for elephants and not for man.

### *The Native and the Elephant*

Strange as it may sound, here at Lake Chad the natives seldom come in contact with elephants. Often they hear them, but whenever this happens they are so terrified that they go out of their way to avoid encountering the animals. I have never been able to understand this terror on the part of the natives, since

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

the elephants have demonstrated time and again that they will go to almost any lengths to avoid the villages, and if once in a while they cannot help passing through a village they do not so much as upset a single mat. I have watched them moving cautiously forward in single file, carefully circling around any object that is on the ground in a painstaking effort not to harm it.

When I reported the incident of the cow who haunted a village at night, coming four times and trampling down two huts in search of her child which I was keeping there, it must be chalked up to my inexperience. I cannot understand now how I could have been so stupid as to corral a captured baby elephant so close to a village!

The natives must, however, have had some bad experiences with elephants in the past, otherwise they could not have invented the saying, which I have already quoted: 'If you rob an elephant mother of her child, she will come and kill all of us.' Experience must have justified this feeling, at least in part.

I have already told about the little elephants who are so exhausted that they throw themselves down on the ground and lie there prostrate in a dead sleep for half an hour or so. While her offspring is resting in this way, the mother elephant may wander off in search of food, leaving her child for a moment unguarded. An unsuspecting native may come walking along through the veld during an interlude of this kind. Suddenly, he sees a small elephant lying at his feet; fearful and astonished, he stands there spellbound. All at once the baby elephant wakes, jumps to his feet, and feels at the astonished native with his trunk. He is not in the least afraid and wants nothing better than to stay with

## THE HERD LIFE

his new-found friend. Even if the native should run away, the baby will run after him, for in the wilderness a young, helpless animal will cling to anything that is alive.

This happy idyll in which man and elephant baby play so naturally together is rudely interrupted by the arrival of the mother elephant. The native has not seen her coming. The first thing he knows is that a huge grey animated mass is hurling itself at him. In a few seconds everything has been trampled to pulp.

Through ignorance many lives have been lost in this way, and it is no wonder that the natives to-day, remembering the tragedies of the past, are not anxious to go out with me to capture elephants. They move respectfully out of the path of the great beast. 'If you rob an elephant mother of her child, she will come and kill all of us' – so says the King, so say the village elders, so say the people themselves. And so they continue to give the elephant a wide berth.

Of all the natives, the harpoon fishermen come into closest contact with the elephants. But even these men will not go to their fishing preserves if the elephants have settled there. In the last third of the dry season, when the wide veld is completely desiccated and the nomads can no longer find water for their herds of cattle, sheep, and goats, they all come together at the shores of Lake Chad. At this time you can see herds of cattle and elephants wandering through the early morning toward the lake. Sometimes these curiously assorted animals are only fifty to a hundred yards apart, but they saunter along peacefully toward their common goal. The nomads (Fulanis) are probably the only people in the region who are not in the least

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

afraid of the elephants. They corral their animals at night, at some distance from Lake Chad, but they do this because of the blood-sucking insect pests and not because of the elephants.

Whenever I had a baby elephant in my camp, the natives would crowd to see him. For them the sight of an elephant was a sensation. In contrast to this we would be astonished if a six-year-old child in Europe or America had never seen an elephant.

For generations the natives have known of the seasonal migrations of the elephants. The great animals may not always appear at exactly the same time to the very day, but, nevertheless, they always stop at approximately the same places. The natives are always informed by travellers about where the herd has halted at any given time. With their first words of greeting, they mention the elephants. When word of this kind comes to a village the mayor and his ministers go at once to the palaver hall and discuss ways and means of safeguarding their crops. Mostly it is a question of corn, thick red or yellow millet, beans, and pumpkins; onions also may be among the threatened crops. After a long palaver the mayor and the ministers come to an agreement and set the time at which the harvesting is to be done.

The elephants, however, are also holding important meetings; they, too, must decide on their harvest time. The oldest members of the herd have gone into a huddle and are 'palavering' together; some want one thing, some want another. But only one party will be able to harvest the crops; the elephants understand that, too. The question under discussion, therefore, is a simple one: Who will be the first to get to the crops?

## THE HERD LIFE

The elephant is a very clever animal, and he knows that if he were to stop at the same places at the same time each year, he would find all the feeding grounds bare. While that would not mean starvation, it would mean that he would be deprived of the delicacies that he loves best – corn, beans, millet, and pumpkin. So, each year the herd visits a certain region at approximately the same date, but, for two to four days in succession, he will suddenly leave his resting place and go off to the south or middle region to do his harvesting – a manoeuvre possible for him because of his marvellous speed. If he cannot finish his harvesting in one night, he simply stays for two or three.

This game of wits between natives and elephants has been played for many years, and almost always the elephant, with his animal cunning, comes out the victor.

There are, however, a few flaws to the arrangement. For instance, the native might very well say to himself: 'No – I haven't made that bargain. I just won't plant this year, and if I don't plant then you, Mr Elephant, can't harvest.' For the native is not entirely dependent on his crops, he would be no more likely to starve than the elephant. Then what would happen? For one thing, the elephant would march sixty miles or so in order to harvest a given spot, only to find on his arrival that 'the cupboard was bare', a misfortune too great for him to contemplate. Then there is always the possibility that for once the native might outwit the elephant and get to the fields first, reap the harvest, and snatch the ripe corn or millet from under the nose of his rival.

But none of these things are likely to happen. For if

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

the elephant really sets out on a long march, he will find his crop waiting for him at the end of it, as sure as fate. This brings us to a wonderful arrangement that exists inside the herd.

### *The Quartermaster Corps*

Again and again it is by accident that you make your best discoveries. In my case it was a long and heated quarrel among the elephants that gave me the clue to a problem that had long been bothering me.

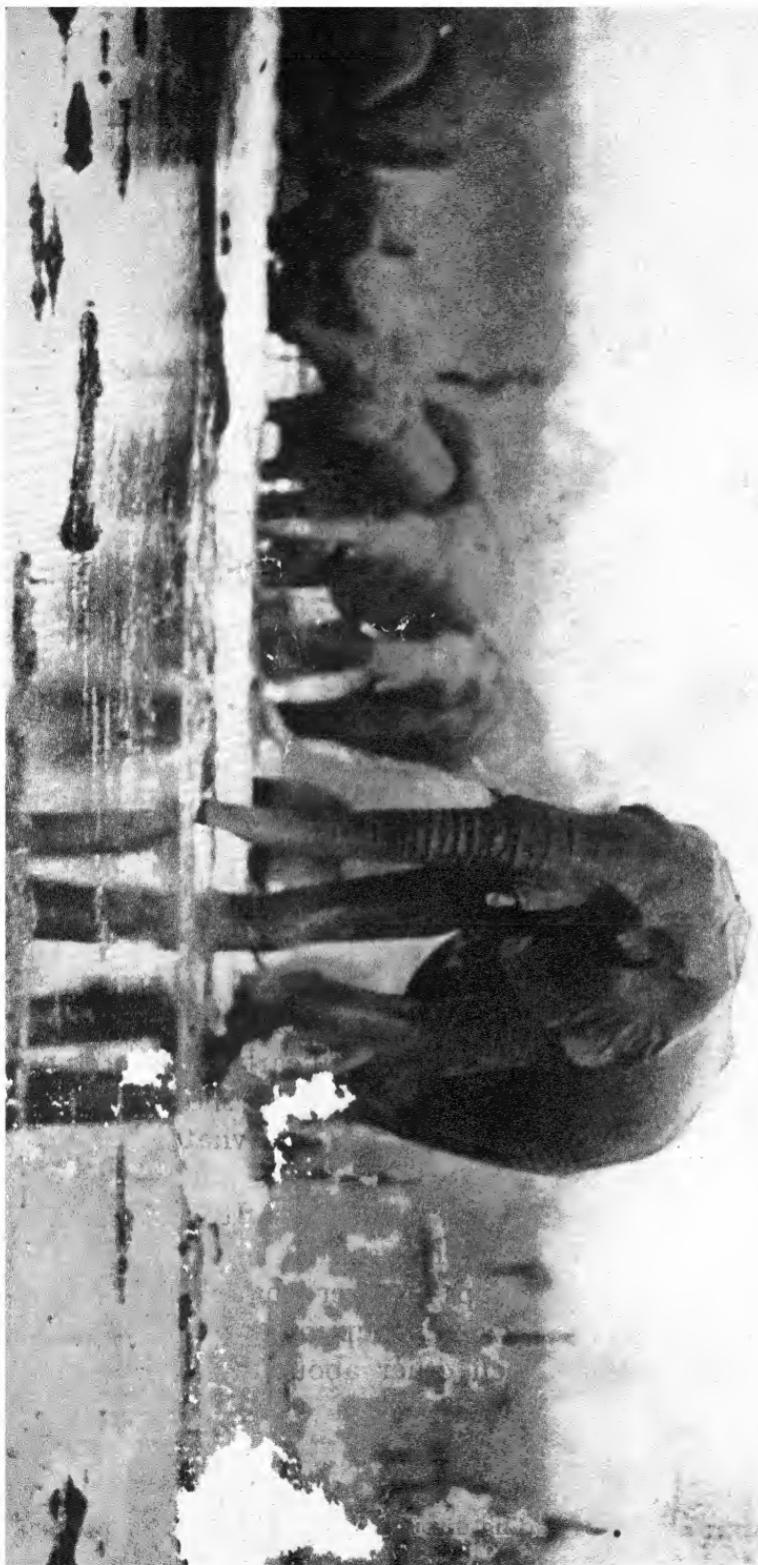
It was long past midnight and the elephants were still in the midst of a palaver, seemingly unable to reach an agreement. They had already left Lake Chad and had entered the near-by forest, and in their hunger were snapping off twigs and branches.

I had made my preparations and was ready to travel with the herd that night, taking only Bukhari with me. The other boys were to follow and wait for me in a village that lay much farther to the north.

The elephants were gathered at the exact spot that marked the divide between the middle and northern regions of Lake Chad, and so I was certain they would march off in one or the other direction.

But everything happened very differently from what I had anticipated. From night until early morning the sentries stood on the near side of the lake where they were making a terrific racket. I had not the least idea what they were fighting about.

At dawn they were still quarrelling. It was so light that I decided to climb a tree so that I would be able to see farther and perhaps discover what all this fighting was about. I saw a group of twenty-five old elephants pushing each other about and screaming





## THE HERD LIFE

with excitement. The other animals had left long since for the farthest part of Lake Chad. In the group that had stayed behind there was one young animal, about a year old.

Suddenly I heard a loud screaming. I waited up in my tree, convinced that something drastic was about to take place. 'Will it happen to me?' I wondered. But this time the attack was not directed against me but against a cow, the mother of the young elephant. The other elephants had grabbed hold of her and were expelling her from the group by main force. They plunged their tusks into her neck, chest, and hind-quarters, shoving her off in a direction that they seemed to have agreed on. The group won at last, and the cow, followed by her child, ran off quickly in the direction indicated.

The young elephant had already reached the age of independence and, in addition, the cow was travelling by herself, so I was very much tempted to steal the child. It must have been about four o'clock in the afternoon when I caught up with them, but the cow was no longer alone; she had an escort of three giant males. Bukhari and I ran after the party; we were so exhausted by this time that we hardly knew what we were doing. We had started on our marathon at six o'clock in the morning, on empty stomachs, of course, and we had been running all day through the broiling heat, which made the air flicker and shimmer before our eyes, only to find that in the whole big outer lake there was not a single drop of water to be seen. This meant that all of us, ~~Bukhari~~, the elephants, and I, were forced to march back to the divide that very night.

No happy thoughts came to me on that long and

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

gruelling return journey. Bukhari threw himself into the fresh, steaming elephant urine, which, however, was nothing extraordinary since natives are accustomed to drink the urine of cows.

Although at this time of the year the outer Chad should have had water for at least three weeks, I could discover no water in the whole northern tip. The elephants did not move from the divide where the last bit of water was to be found but sent their scouts on ahead to see how things were in the north country. Now it was easy to understand the cause of the previous night's quarrel. There must have been a difference of opinion, and the messengers must even have been divided among themselves. The cow must have been one of the leaders of the opposition. Only close and vigilant observation could prove or disprove the truth of my conjecture.

Once more the herd had to make a decision, and a big palaver was under way. Four elephants (the cow and her calf were still missing) set off in the direction of the open veld. The main herd, deprived of its fat pasturage for the second night, an unusual occurrence, waded into Lake Chad in a very bad humour.

Dog-tired, Bukhari lay like a dead man under a tree and snored. I took Colo as a substitute for him, and set out to follow the four elephants who had gone off ahead. I knew that this was the only way to find the explanation for all the strange things that had been going on, so I jogged along behind the scouts, while Colo kept to the tracks.

To begin with, the elephants headed directly west, moving through a light acacia forest. After two hours, however, they changed their course to a north-westerly

## THE HERD LIFE

direction, steering for the open veld. Toward noon they had arrived at a thick wood of thorn bushes which had lain like a dark stripe on the horizon.

I was so exhausted that I had only one wish – to lie still. As a magnet is attracted to metal, so was I now attracted to the earth. I was in luck – my four elephants were obliging enough to stop for their midday rest. I threw myself down flat on the ground and slept for three hours. Colo, who did not dare touch a white man and who could not call because the elephants would hear him, was in a quandary, because the animals were about to march off and he wanted to wake me. But he managed to find a way out of his dilemma by sitting down close beside me and imitating the call of a gazelle, a sound the elephants were welcome to hear. In a second I was up and off we went again, loping along at a rate of five miles an hour.

In the late afternoon the elephants stopped beside a water-hole that was almost as big as a small lake. Both men and beasts found the mud-dirty water very refreshing.

I had never been to this place before, but I knew from Bukhari that this was water country. During the afternoon I had noticed many bean fields, so I harboured the suspicion that the elephants had perhaps come here in order to see whether the natives had been industrious this year. If the answer was 'yes' then they would probably decide that it was worth their while to have the whole herd come and join them for the harvest. With this in mind, I sneaked away from the water-hole and lay down under a tree. Stuffing a handful of peanuts into my mouth and chewing absent-mindedly, I tried to figure out what the palaver of the previous

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

night could have been about. If my suspicions were correct, then the harvesters, meaning the elephants, would have to appear by the next night at the latest. To prove my theory I need only sit still and wait.

As soon as the sun had set, both Colo and I decided to while away our wait by sleeping. Sleeping was one suggestion, along with eating, that the boys always accepted without objection.

Long before dawn – it must have been around three o'clock in the morning – my theory was proved correct. The harvesters, with their wives and children, had appeared during the night, two herds which were often stationed near each other joining forces for the occasion. They had come so silently that I had not even noticed their arrival.

A little while later my boys hove into view. The sly Bukhari must have been tipped off to follow the elephants by his great prophet, Allah. My headman, Ibrahim, swore that he was not responsible for the visitation. Next to him stood that little fox of a Bukhari, rolling his roguish eyes and confirming everything Ibrahim said with a groaning 'Allah'.

So we were all together again.

Now I asked myself whether the arrival of the elephants was a mere coincidence or whether it was really proof that some sort of scouting system existed inside the herd. I had to wait six months before my theory was proved correct and I could consider the case closed.

Whenever elephants undertake a migration big enough to involve a change of region, they send scouts on ahead to explore the lay of the land. Let us call these scouts the quartermaster corps. Their task is to

## THE HERD LIFE

investigate the situation and send back a report to the herd.

The herd follows as soon as it gets the 'all clear'. Sometimes it comes by a roundabout way, sometimes by a direct route, as in the case I have just described. Since my boys reported their own route to me, and had followed the tracks of the herd, I could easily prove that the elephants had come in a direct line. Later on I was to discover that this is not always the case, but I have never seen a herd follow in the tracks of its quartermasters. The arrival of the herd does not always take place promptly on the day following the visit of the scouts, nor even on the next night; the time lapse may be anywhere from one to four days, but I have never known it to be more than that.

You can save yourself a lot of useless waiting by sticking close to the quartermaster elephants, for if they find something that is not to their liking, or if they scent an enemy in the offing, they will turn right around and go straight back to the herd.

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

I WONDER IF there is anyone in the world who has never heard of the rogue elephant\* and who has not been told how dangerous these animals are? Many white men, both in Africa and India, tell hair-raising stories of their personal experiences with them and our books are full of sensational tales. I do not believe that there is another animal who has been the victim of so much fantastic and irresponsible myth.

One day a young merchant came to sell me some of his dried codfish. 'Mr Oberjohann,' he began, 'yesterday I had a piece of luck - I escaped a rogue elephant by the skin of my teeth.'

'Where did that happen?' I asked.

'Very near here. I was going to the village to collect fish.'

'That's very interesting,' I said. 'Will you let me have one of the boys who went with you yesterday? I'd like to go and take a look at the tracks.'

'Of course . . . only, I didn't see the rogue myself, but my boys heard that a rogue is supposed to be roaming about here. He's very dangerous, they say.'

Another time it was a planter, a man who had lived in Africa for more than twenty years. He came to me with the following tale: 'I was walking peacefully along the riverbank when suddenly a rogue elephant rushed out of the bushes, grabbed me with his trunk, and flung me twenty yards through the air. I landed in

\*Solitary bulls living apart from the herd and generally believed to be of aggressive and spiteful disposition.

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

the middle of the river. Fortunately I wasn't hurt - I was saved by the fact that I fell into the water.'

I could go on for ever with such fantastic nonsense. Before I had met my first wild elephants in their natural setting, I was very much impressed and influenced by the books I had read, tall tales told by a variety of elephant hunters. And those stories cost many a fine giant his life! Whenever I remember that period, I am ashamed of myself for having been so gullible in believing the experts, and I now deeply regret that, for some time, I shot every lone elephant I met, thinking that I was dealing with a rogue.

I began to have qualms when, after I had killed off eight lone elephants out of a herd of a hundred, the solitary elephants kept right on appearing. Even a stupid person must realize that no herd of a hundred elephants can possess so many rogues. I was horrified when, a year later, I encountered the same herd and discovered the real rogues living all by themselves in a sort of Old Men's Home. Another year was to pass, however, before I had conclusive proof that I had been shooting the herd sentries who had been patrolling at varying distances away from each other.

It took a long time to solve the riddle of why these old bulls formed separate groups of such unpredictable size. There were never less than six, and sometimes eight, or ten, forming a group apart. I never met more than eleven together.

Once more I found the solution by accident. I had left Bukhari to watch the Old Men's Home while I stayed near by trying to kidnap a baby antelope only a few days old from a family of kobs.

Late that afternoon, Bukhari appeared with the

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

news that an *Ubaba-Giva* (elephant grandfather) had run away, and he showed me the tracks. I started off, jogging along in the old elephant's tracks, and caught up with him while it was still daylight. The rest of my pursuit was aided by the brilliance of the moon, which lit up the veld as brightly as if it were day. The old elephant reached the herd before midnight, roving back and forth and making wide circles around what had been his family group. Late the next evening he was again back with the other old men.

For two months I took advantage of the nights of brilliant moonlight to travel back and forth with the old elephants. And in the end I got a good picture of what was going on.

The number of old elephants forming a group apart varied, but there were never more than eleven or less than six. I made a point of memorizing the face of each animal. The easiest way to do this is to observe the tusks, which are markedly different on each animal. The ears, too, are a reliable check, as their jagged edges are clearly visible. I soon found that there was one group of elders who stayed together and had their quarters away from the gathering place of the main herd; these were always the same animals. But there were five other animals who commuted back and forth to the herd; they went at irregular intervals, each one by himself. Nor did they follow a common route, whether going or coming, each elephant travelling his own particular path.

At times the commuters would leave at intervals of fifteen minutes or so, but they went by such different ways that you wondered whether they were planning to visit the same herd. Sometimes, in response to some

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

spontaneous impulse, an elephant would suddenly turn on his heels and come back. There was no cut-and-dried rule as to the length of time they would stay near their former families, circling around the herd at a distance of as much as three hundred yards. One animal might start back to the Old Men's Home after only a few hours, while another one could not tear himself away from the herd for two weeks or so. But in general the number of commuters remained at five while the stay-at-homes were always the same six. All of the elephants had once been members of bigger herds.

Watching these old elephants, I always had the feeling that they were like old men who are gripped with a deep, irresistible urge to see their grandchildren just once more, even if only for a single hour. Again and again, this yearning takes hold of them and they undertake the strenuous trip, regardless of its hardships. Then at last the day comes when the last reserve of spiritual and physical activity is drained from them and they are too old to go visiting any longer.

Another interesting observation I made was that the elephants of the Old Men's Home remained in constant contact with their former families. The distance between them and the herd never exceeded twelve miles, and it amounted to that much only on those days when I had had some kind of disturbance with the herd (either a catch or a shooting), in which case the elephants would, of course, move off at a run.

As soon as the herd departed, the old boys would get restive and soon would travel after the herd, moving at a slower rate and making detours. It was only then that the distance between the two groups became appreciable.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

Once I had discovered this close connection between the herd and the old elephants, it was much simpler for me to track down the herd. The old males I could always find easily; I had only to walk along the shores of Lake Chad to find their tracks, which invariably led into the lake. Perhaps I should mention here that the old elephants did not always go as far as the outlying papyrus niches but frequently concealed themselves in the high reeds which grew conveniently on the near shore of the lake. Nor did the old males travel to the rich feeding grounds with the herd; they lived modestly on reed-marrow and on the wild sweet beans and the young shoots and branches from the acacia woods which abutted on the lake shore.

Once I had found the tracks of the old bulls, I had to keep a sharp lookout for the herd, which would certainly be within a radius of six miles. Also, I had to take care that the old males did not notice my proximity. As soon as they got my scent, they would at once warn the herd, which would immediately take off at a run.

None of this was exactly simple, but it was made even more difficult by the fact that the old males knew of my presence even when we had had no direct contact. Very often I would succeed in sneaking past them, but an hour or two later, in the course of their saunterings, they would come across my tracks and my unpleasant human smell would betray me to them. At once they would signal my arrival to the herd while I, all unsuspecting, would go on ahead doing my best to find it.

One thing was certain. If either the old males or the herd got wind of my presence, they would be off at

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

once. Although I was already convinced of the fact that news of my doings was signalled back and forth between the herd and the old elephants, I could have definite proof of this team-work only if I had conclusive evidence that both herd and old elephants ran away at exactly the same moment.

This might seem a simple matter to the European or the American. 'All you need do,' they would tell me, 'is to take a couple of stop watches, station a man with each group, fire a starting shot, stop the watches, read the time, and there you are!'

Unfortunately, I had no watch, and even if I had owned one it would have been useless to me because there was no one, besides myself, who could tell time by it. But for my own satisfaction I commissioned my mail runner to buy me the cheapest alarm clock that could be found in Maidugari. He arrived with the clock about three weeks later, and I immediately began my lessons in telling time. After four weeks gave up. The clock had hung on a leather strap around Ibrahim's neck for all these days and had withstood every hazard . . . but my lessons had been a complete failure. After that, I abandoned the idea of determining the simultaneous departure of the two herds with a European instrument and relied on the sun instead. My boys could always read the exact time by the sun, but it was an art in which, sad to say, I was not sufficiently proficient to vouch for the absolute accuracy of our results. My boys swore, however, that both herd and old elephants raced simultaneously, the moment I had an encounter with either of them.

These observations should make one thing clear: rogue elephants, as hunters describe them and as we

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

read of them in books, simply do not exist. There are isolated sections along the West African coast where the elephant herds are very small (six to twenty animals to a herd), because here the species has reached a point of near extinction; in herds of such reduced size there cannot, of course, be substantial groups of oldsters. In a herd of nineteen or twenty elephants, there probably will be only one animal outcast because of his age.

In this connection, extremely interesting and dramatic family events have taken place before my eyes. Once I was even present when one very old elephant was thrown out of the herd, but I was not able to understand the true significance of the rite until I had fitted it into the larger picture of the love life of the herd.

Both male and female elephants are much more selective in their choice of a mate than other high animal forms. Their impressive love scenes always take place during the early hours of dawn. Elephants will permit casual partners to embrace them, to press jowl against jowl or to rub their great heads together, but they are reluctant to kiss. I have often seen a fastidious female withdraw from the embraces of an old male, grumble deeply, and rush away. Her path always leads in the direction of a young lover who is somewhere in the offing; now she is the aggressor and embraces him tempestuously. The whole world is forgotten as their mouths join in a kiss when, suddenly, the young cavalier backs away and goes off on the run. The blissful rendezvous has lasted only a few minutes. Dignified and confident of ultimate victory, the rejected suitor now stalks slowly and ponderously on to

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

the scene. The young cavalier, on his guard, watches for the approach of his elderly rival, for he knows that this love affair may cost him his life. He is still so immature that his sex urge is not strong enough to drive him into a combat that must mean either victory or death. He has just time to back out before it is too late.

Once again the old male confronts the female of his choice, and this time she gives in to his demands. But after a short interlude of desultory love-making, she is once more straining to get back to the young male. Soon the old, dark grey colossus, patient and confident, saunters off after her, his pulsing strength still un-depleted. And since the young lover has not yet reached the stage where he dares to challenge his rival to a duel, the female, driven by her own desire, finally submits to her old suitor.

The day comes, however, when the young male, conscious of his strength, challenges his old rival. Unable to retreat, the older elephant loses the first round and with it his status as a functioning male within the family circle. He may still stay on awhile longer with the group as a tolerated and respected member.

Gradually, as time passes, he becomes conscious of his age and of his impotence, and now the most difficult and dangerous time of his life is at hand. He lives on in the midst of his family, lonely and unhappy. Sick at heart and raging inwardly, he attacks every elephant in the herd. To the accompaniment of terrible trumpeting an old *Ubaba-Gi* of this kind will trample the ground so viciously that, in only a few seconds, he is up to his belly in the earth. The ground quakes and the animal is hidden from sight by a cloud of dust.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

At last, the time has come when he must leave his family. One fine morning he is confronted by a group of younger elephants who push him about with their thick, heavy heads until, after a raging ordeal, he is expelled from the herd. His wails, his protests, and his screams fall on deaf ears; he is cast out without mercy. He will never again live with his wives, his children, or his grandchildren; the family, whose leader he was in good days and ill bad, is now lost to him for ever.

The old creature has now qualified for the experts' pronouncements - out of this ancient, intractable, dark grey mass of flesh, they have created that most dangerous of elephants, the rogue.

Actually, these old elephants can be provoked into battle only with difficulty; if they fight at all, it is without zest. Not one of them enters whole-heartedly into an attack or carries it through to the end, as is the custom among all active herd animals. With their trunks held just a little above nose level, and their ears stiff and cocked at right angles, as always in times of danger, they will amble off in a quick gait, and I always got the impression that they were relieved to have escaped so easily.

Sometimes I would try to provoke them by jumping out at them suddenly and blocking their path at about fifteen yards. For about ten seconds the old *Uba-Giva* would stand stock-still opposite me, rigid and motionless, as if this sudden appearance of a man had caused a temporary paralysis of the will. This state of inaction would be followed by a deep, angry trumpeting, accompanied by an involuntary tremor of the head. I would counter with a sudden yell and act as if I were about to jump at him and do battle. As in the case of

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

the one- to three-year-old elephants who imitate their elders when attacked, assuming a stern and important stance and making a terrific noise, only to wheel and scurry off if you play elephant too and threaten to attack *them*, the old elephants would hold their ground up to twenty feet, then bolt as if the devil were at their heels.

However, when it was a case of helping another member of the herd, the old elephants were just as useful as the young ones. I came to be very fond of the 'ancients', and although I had long since selected one of them as a target for my gun, I let every opportunity for a shot pass. 'Another time', I always told myself.

Just as you instinctively protect children and old people, so I now went against my instinct to shoot one of the veterans. But one morning I saw nine old animals standing together in the reeds. They were divided into two groups and they were talking to each other, mumbling confidentially, their heads facing into the circle.

I stood on the shoulders of Momodo, who was six feet tall, and I was walled in by the reeds so that I was just able to get my nose above their tips, for the water was five and a half feet deep here. The distance between me and the nearest elephant could not have been more than twenty yards. That was much closer than I wanted to be, but under conditions of this sort it is very difficult to gauge the distance by hearing alone. As soon as I got my nose above the reeds, I realized that we were in for a good fight.

By ducking down I could prevent their seeing me but I could not keep one of the old elephants from taking a few steps toward me so that suddenly I was



## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

practically under his giant feet. I was still perched on Momodo's shoulders and, foreseeing what was to come, I took the gun from him. Hardly was I standing upright again when everything happened just as I had feared it would. It was as if one old elephant had said to the others, 'Excuse me a second. I have a feeling that someone is here and I think I'll investigate.' So the old elephant came toward me and the others peered in my direction with trunks lifted.

When he was about twenty-five feet away from me, the elephant stood still. At times like this, shooting is not a matter of reflection but of instinct. While my eyes were busy taking the sight at the highest spot on the elephant's head, just above the curve of the eyes, my thoughts were with poor Momodo, who, screened by the reeds, had no idea what was about to happen. 'Be quiet,' I told myself, 'or that scared rabbit will notice that something is wrong.'

Then the bullet went whistling through the air.

Immediately Momodo decided that things were getting too hot for comfort and, forgetting completely that I happened to be standing on his shoulders, he ducked in his excitement; he forgot to brace my ankles, a sign that he had completely lost his head. But this turned out to be an advantage, because it left my feet free and unhampered, so that I was able to jump down off his shoulders - an improvement on the general rule, for usually he held my feet in a grip of iron and, whether I liked it or not, I would go head over heels into reeds, water or mud.

Once I was really in a bad way and, unless I wanted to knock my head open by falling head first into the woodyard reeds and dried-out ground, I had to jump

## THE ROGUE ELEPHANT

quickly. In this emergency, I slapped Momodo's face with the flat of my hand. That did it. In his fright, he let go of my ankles and I was able to jump down in time. It was a rough but effective remedy, and although I disliked to employ methods of this kind, I was forced to resort to them now and again. In any case, Momodo never complained.

This time, I could not afford to let a frightened Momodo leave me in the lurch. I held on to him, forcing his hands on to his back so that I could climb back upon his shoulders.

The elephant nearest me had collapsed. One quick look was enough to see that; besides, I had heard the crash of his fall very distinctly. Three of the other veterans had hurried to his assistance and they were only about twenty-five feet away from me now. In spite of my being so close to them, they went right on with their rescue work, struggling with might and main to get their wounded friend on to his feet. Two of them saw me now for the first time but paid no attention to my presence. The third trotted off after the other elephants, who were already disappearing at a run. The two who had stayed behind with their stricken comrade were fireless in their efforts to help him get up, but their endeavours had no success. Their despair in the face of their own helplessness was very obvious and, as they stood there trying to decide what to do next, they looked me straight in the eye. Suddenly, the wounded elephant managed to get up by himself. It was as if he had wakened from some death-like coma. He was staggering badly and his legs seemed to lose touch with the ground. His two friends pressed their broad heads against his body to support him and

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

so led him slowly away. All at once a great mass of water shot up into the air: in spite of the help he was getting from his comrades, the old elephant had collapsed again, and with his two friends standing by, grey and motionless, as if they had been turned to rock, he lay down to die.

## THE ELEPHANT BURIAL GROUNDS

ORIGINALLY, THE ELEPHANT lived at peace with man, but during the last three to five thousand years he has been in constant flight. The elephant is a clever animal, and he has tried a variety of protective measures, but all of them have failed to keep him safe. Although he was a day animal to begin with, constant persecution has forced him to become a creature of the night. To-day he is a restive wanderer, always in flight, roaming the country like a ghost by day and night.

Nowadays, the elephant lives inside very definite boundaries which he does not dare to cross. He leaves his home territory only when there is a great natural catastrophe, like the 1949 drought in East Africa, for instance, when, half crazed with thirst, he set off in search of water. It puzzles hunters when they see the elephant clinging to his home country in spite of the fact that richer pastures lie just across the border, and they explain this by saying that the elephant does not know of them. But they are mistaken. The elephant is much better informed than either the white men or the natives about even outlying country. Time and again a couple of the oldest and most experienced members of the herd will go off on trips of exploration.

The elephant has found everything that he needs except a safe home. In the past this was not true. In those days he lived where the best feeding grounds were to be found, but now, since he has been pursued so relentlessly by man, he will avoid even the richest

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE.

pastures if a safe home is not to be found there. I say 'home' – but what I should say is 'a hiding place from man'. Originally the elephant recognized no boundaries, because at that time he knew of no enemy from whom he must hide. Then he was not forced to go foraging in the secrecy of the night, he could graze the whole day long, and when night surprised him he could rest peacefully to sleep under the wide, starlit sky. It was the persecution of men which forced him into his unnatural life. With the possible exception of the whale, there is no instance in the whole of zoology of another persecution of this kind. Other animals have enemies, it is true, but that is because one animal is dependent on another for survival. Cats are not the enemies of mice; they merely need the smaller animals for their subsistence. But the elephant is not necessary to the sustenance of other animals, nor are other animals necessary to him, nor is there any natural enmity between him and his fellow animals as there is, for instance, between dog and cat. This giant is one of the most peaceful of living creatures. Indeed, the consequences would be unthinkable if this great animal had been endowed by nature with the will to destruction.

The elephant attempted to escape human persecution by hiding during the day. At an early date, therefore, he must have known that man is helpless in the dark. But this did not help him, for human ingenuity ferreted out the hiding places that had seemed safe, and so, driven by man, the elephant was compelled to take refuge in the swamps that he feared so much. And because man did not molest him as long as he kept to these swamps, the elephant again adopted a mode of living that was unnatural to him.

## THE ELEPHANT BURIAL GROUNDS

For the elephant is by nature neither a night nor a swamp animal. If you watch him enter a swamp, deliberating cautiously before he takes the first step, you can see at once that this is not his normal environment. The hunter is no judge of this, for in the earliest grey morning hours when the herd disappears into its swampy hide-out, he gives up the chase. 'That's enough for to-day,' he tells himself. ~~I can~~ follow them any farther.' It is not the swamp alone which discourages the hunter from pursuing his quarry; there is also the hazard provided by the almost impassable tangle of vegetation. And, last but not least, the thought of the dangerous animals that inhabit the swamp - I need mention only crocodiles and snakes - makes him lose heart for the venture. But if a hunter once did decide to follow the elephants into the swamps, he would be very much surprised, unless he should just happen to strike a bad day when there were big expanses of water to traverse, to see how easily a healthy man can accomplish this feat. He would not find a swamp in the literal sense of the word but, at worst, two feet of swampy surface under which there is firm ground. Because of this no hunter who tracks the elephants into the swamp will lose his life. But in the case of hippopotami, I would not swear to such a sanguine outcome; I have often got into great difficulty myself when trapping those unpleasant creatures.

The elephants, however, have been accustomed to the swamp for hundreds of years now, and they know this labyrinth so well that they wander through it at an amazing speed, seemingly carefree and unworried. It is for this reason that a casual observer is apt to be misled and to think that the elephant is the master of

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

the swamp. Once, however, when I barred the path of an elephant in such a way that his only chance of escape was to cross a stretch of swamp only fifteen yards in length and three or four feet deep, he would not take this way out. On this and other occasions the elephant has demonstrated clearly that he feared death by shooting less than the swamp, even when the swamp is relatively shallow. Furthermore, there is the insect pest which waits in the swamp to torture this susceptible giant and against which he has no defence. When we consider these facts, it becomes very clear that man has forced the elephant to adopt a way of life inimical to his nature, and no thinking person can help being deeply moved by his unhappy plight.

Some people believe that the elephant goes into the swamp of his own free will to bathe. This is not true; the elephant takes his bath in the outlying mudholes.

Every animal has a lair to which it can retreat from danger, a refuge where it feels safe and hidden from its enemies. Originally the elephant, because of his great strength and peaceful character, was an exception to this rule. He, alone, needed neither lair nor hiding place. But when man made war on him, the elephant either had to find himself a sanctuary or be destroyed. It was then that he discovered the swamps. Here, even if he had neither a pleasant life nor a good feeding ground, he was at least safe from his pursuer. In this refuge he could rest, die, and be buried. So now, no matter how rich a pasturage may be, the elephant will not allow it to lure him from the site where his burial grounds are. A herd will only settle down in a country where Nature provides a real home, a safe hiding place, and a proper burial ground.

## THE ELEPHANT BURIAL GROUNDS

It is to these hide-outs that the elephant goes when he is about to die. If a sick animal has been shot (i.e., if it is sick as well as wounded), it will no longer continue with the herd but will leave its companions to stagger off alone toward its burial ground. And if there are comrades helping it, they will support the dying animal and lead it off to the cemetery to die.

If anyone imagines that he can plunder one of these elephant cemeteries, he is mistaken. You must remember that a single burial ground often covers hundreds of miles and also that whole lake and river regions, with their immense outskirts of swamp land, form one huge elephant sanctuary. A cemetery in the human sense is unknown to elephants.

Finally, I should like to remind the reader that no human being has ever seen a wild elephant die a natural death.

## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

WHEN I WAS still more than sixty yards away from her, a cow once charged at me in the ferocious manner that is typical of one attack, an attack on the run. I should like to enlarge a little on this point, because many hunters who had once taken part in a safari had sworn to me that they had been attacked by a whole group of elephants, yet they were unable to describe what the typical formation of attack was. I am not surprised at their inaccuracy, for in the midst of an adventure of this kind, every man has to concentrate first and foremost on getting out alive, and so the imagination has a chance to play tricks on the inexperienced hunter.

Only by extensive work in the field does one gain an idea of the pattern of attack. Working with elephants requires time, plenty of time, for these giant beasts have a talent for deception that is second only to man's. Those giants in captivity prove time and again that it is only on rare occasions that an elephant drops his mask and reveals his true nature. Whenever I had dealings with captive elephants I could not help being profoundly impressed by their poker faces hiding all their intentions.

An elephant can attack in two different ways. Normally, he will choose a rapid pace at a speed of about ten miles an hour. The other way is the charge when he finds himself in deep water. It is therefore impossible to tell from his speed whether an attack is intended. To those who say, 'More than twenty ele-

## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

phants came charging at me and that certainly is proof enough that I was attacked', I would answer, 'My dear Mr Elephant Expert, I'm afraid you have no proof at all that an attack was intended.'

Especially when a herd would be charging at me from quite a distance, it was often my experience that, with only eight or ten yards separating us and I in full sight of them, they would suddenly turn off, grumbling angrily. This proved that an attack was not intended.

The elephant is a near-sighted animal. It is certain that, from a distance of thirty yards, he can distinguish practically nothing. How, then, can one explain his actions in this connection?

On many occasions I was quite unable to account for the flight of a herd which seemed to be heading straight for me and which had given every indication of launching an attack. Perhaps their retreat was caused by a few natives who happened to be passing to the rear of the herd completely unaware of its presence.

From the outset one has to reckon with this unknown factor. One may feel certain that one is alone with the herd, and yet this may not be the case at all; a few old native women may be wandering at quite a distance from the herd and yet be the cause of its sudden flight.

Often one is unable to find any rational explanation to account for the sudden flight of a herd. I discovered on two occasions that the elephants had been fleeing from the wild horses which, here at Lake Chad, run about in small groups. If anyone believes that I have enumerrated all the different ways by which the presence of an enemy is communicated to the herd, he is

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

greatly mistaken. The whole animal world connives to warn the elephant of the presence or the imminent approach of an enemy.

I am often surprised that elephant hunters have not reached similar conclusions by observing these strange coincidences that occur with such frequency. Instead, they turn the elephant into a far-sighted animal who embarks on an attack from a great distance.

What are the characteristics of a herd or a single animal in flight? First of all, there is the rate of speed. The smallest nurslings, those under a year old, are unable to keep up with a pace of about ten miles an hour. This fact determines the whole strategy of capture.

Otherwise, the behaviour of young animals differs from that of the older ones only in that they do not scent with lifted trunks as the adults do when not in motion. They simply stop in their tracks and wait tensely with cocked ears. These halts in the midst of a retreat occur at very irregular intervals. Immediately the trunk of an adult animal flies up into the air, the big ears stand out like boards while the elephant listens intently, and simultaneously his big head turns from one side to the other.

In flight the herd formations differ, but an experienced observer can tell at once whether the elephants are in chaotic flight or retreating in close order. When a herd breaks up into larger or smaller groups that race off in different directions, it is a sure sign that the herd has lost its head. If one of these groups rushes in the direction of the hunter, this is bound to be just a coincidence. It does not mean that the elephants have caught his scent or that they have planned an attack.

## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

Incidentally, a herd always reorganizes in a few minutes, no matter how confused it may be.

When a herd retreats in single file or in square formation, it means that the lead animal (and I have never come across anything but cows in this role) has not lost its head but is leading the group in an orderly withdrawal. If by chance – and this is by no means rare – an entire herd rushes at the hunter in close formation, this is not to be interpreted as an attack, or as proof that the animals have suddenly grown farsighted, or that they have got wind of the enemy. If the elephant comes to a sudden stop twenty to thirty yards from his enemy, trumpets loudly, and angrily tosses his head from side to side, this is the surest sign that no attack was intended. I say the surest sign because, in my experience, whenever a real attack took place, the elephants charged me without a sound, in ominous and complete silence.

It is, however, a good plan to get out of the way of an animal in flight, for, once it has made up its mind, it hates to see its path obstructed but wants passionately to go on in the direction it wants to escape. When an angry elephant trumpets, he is like the driver of an automobile who sounds his horn to *veni nis* violent irritation at the slow, thick-witted pedestrian who waits till the last minute to get out of the way.

I do not blame the reader who now wants to know how I have come by my facts. 'You don't expect me to believe that you just planted yourself in the path of a charging elephant,' he might well exclaim. It was not a matter of an over large amount of courage or a longing for suicide. Quite simply, I was given no choice. At such times I was usually wedged tight in

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

mud and reeds and not infrequently my limbs were so paralysed that I was unable to move an inch out of the way. Coming straight at me, the elephant always swerved at the very last second, when he was only a few feet away from me. As punishment for my careless behaviour, I often received a blow behind my ears or across my shoulders, but only once was it heavy enough to make me lose consciousness and, at that, I accepted it as a fitting penalty for my foolhardy behaviour.

I have cited many examples to show how easily one can misconstrue an attack, but all these possibilities must be negatively evaluated. Anyone who, for any length of time, has been engaged in close encounters with wild elephants will recognize the symptoms of a serious attack as soon as he enters the elephant's field of vision – that is, at a good twenty-five yards' distance.

If the animal's glance is fixed and piercing, so that only the whites of his eyes can be seen, this is a sure sign that the animal is ready to charge. At such a time the elephant will swing his trunk up straight into the air and keep it there, immobile, until he has reached his objective; his ears will stand out like boards, at right angles to his head, and they, too, will remain frozen in this position even as the enraged animal tramples his victim underfoot. This characteristic of belligerency, once seen, can never again be mistaken. All other indications have no dangerous meaning.

But all this tells us nothing of the elephant's amazing ability to scent an enemy, and I want to say a few words especially on this subject. I don't know whether some of my readers will have observed that, just like a dog, the elephant looks for his enemy's trail on the

## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

ground, in the grass, or in the bushes. It is not because of good eyesight that the elephant is able to attack from a considerable distance, but because he has the ability to scent the tracks of his enemy. It is amazing how quickly an animal can follow a scent, always as the prelude to an attack. Ghost-like, the great beast will suddenly appear before you. To me it was always a complete puzzle how a six-ton elephant managed to emerge suddenly without the slightest noise. During an attack of this kind, it again becomes evident that the elephant does not rely on his eyes. He searches for his enemy with his trunk, which he raises slightly and swings continuously, over bush and ground.

Often as he races along in an enraged mood, the elephant will cross the tracks of his foe, who, naturally, has not been running a straight course himself. Then, lifting his trunk, he will try to get the scent of his enemy out of the air; if his efforts are unsuccessful, he will drop his trunk again to the ground and will run back and forth exactly like a dog until, in a second or two, he has once more picked up the trail.

Invariably my pursuers were enraged cows whose calves I had captured. These were isolated instances, however, and again I must insist on the fact that with elephants no hard-and-fast rule can be established. A cow always knows where her calf is, and therefore she may attack at any moment and from any direction.

Because elephants are constantly taking scent, it is very difficult to observe a herd or to travel with it. The most important rule, therefore, is: Never get so close to a herd that it can scent you. If, however, in their search for fodder the animals amble back and forth and if, in addition, you are dealing with a big herd, it

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

becomes almost impossible to stick to even this one rule. When, having used up your last reserve of breath, you manage at last to get out from where the wind will betray you, your exhausting run is nevertheless apt to be of no avail, for at any moment the elephants are likely to come across your fresh tracks. One or another of the many animals always sweeps the ground with his trunk, so you will be discovered and the herd will be off in a jiffy. If all goes well, you may catch up with it after two or three hours. Often my best-laid plans have been spoiled by the elephants' keen sense of smell, and often I got myself into tight spots because of such miscalculations.

One of the most remarkable phenomena observable among elephants is their power to communicate with each other by what I venture to call telepathy. By this word I mean the capacity to transmit messages and the secret, unfailing knowledge of the whereabouts of each individual animal at a distance of a hundred and twenty-five miles. I know of no better word than 'telepathy' to express this strange power. There are, I realize, many unbelievers and doubters, and I, too, used to belong to their number. This does not detract from the fact that every elephant is equipped with a most sensitive apparatus for sending and receiving messages. A careful observer will find proof of this in events so insignificant that they are hardly noticeable, but which nevertheless clearly indicate that the elephant possesses such sensitive organs.

Just as birds change the course of their flight in response to some command which is still a complete mystery to the observer, so among elephants there exists some inaudible, invisible power of communica-

## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

tion. Again and again I have been flabbergasted by occurrences of the kind I shall now describe.

The elephants emerge at a saunter from a thick forest; they are moving in haphazard confusion, singly and in groups, exactly as if there were no order or arrangement in the herd. They come to a gigantic water-hole which is still full of water. All the elephants enter the water-hole, but they are scattered over a distance of about a mile. Only the old veterans, too stiff to lie down because they might never be able to rise again, remain standing; they look on, satisfied and good-humoured, as spry young ones wallow in the mud, contenting themselves with heaping all the rubbish within reach of their trunks on to their broad shoulders.

Slowly I approach a cow who has remained with her calf at the edge of the forest. My intention is to take her by surprise, and I suddenly move into range of her scent so that, in the first impact of her terror, she will flee, giving me a few valuable seconds in which to hobble the child. As I come within her range of scent, I cover the last stretch on the run and, although usually I am absolutely quiet, I now imitate an elephant, screaming at the top of my lungs. As soon as I enter into her range of scent, the whole herd is in a state of alarm. Even those animals who are a mile away from me, unable to hear my voice, standing or lying down or rolling in the mud, are on their feet in a moment and, as if heeding a command, dash off at the double. During this crisis, all noise has stopped as if by magic. Whereas until now the atmosphere was oppressively laden with the deep ventriloquist grumblings of the elephants, now there is dead calm, a sinister death-like silence of the tomb.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

The elephant has an amazingly acute sense of hearing. I can testify that a herd of elephants heard the passage of a single small bird that flitted past at a distance of a good thirty yards. Here I should like to stress the point that I am not speaking of birds or animals who have been frightened and whose flight is, therefore, a sudden whir audible even to human ears. The case of the bird I mentioned above was the softest, quietest flight possible, and yet it was heard by the elephants. And, most important of all, they were able to interpret its meaning.

No natural sound escapes the elephant, but if you are able to imitate the sounds of Nature, you can make a lot of noise as you approach a herd, and the elephants will think nothing of it. I soon discovered that the animals were not alarmed even if I broke the reeds and splashed through the water, but, on the other hand, if I took my bamboo club and hit at the reeds with it, then hell broke loose, for this was a sound outside of Nature's scheme.

There were other occasions that convinced me of the existence of a sensitive apparatus in elephants for sending and receiving messages. If a herd of elephants in groups separated from each other by a distance of one to three miles (which is often the case), and at such distances it takes only a split second for a signal to reach all the scattered groups of animals.

Whenever I observed anything of this kind, I always asked myself whether the intelligent animal who noted the approach of danger 'telegraphed' a warning to the rest of the herd, or whether it was a sound which was heard by the elephants and interpreted by the human ear.





## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

Soon I was to discover that the warning command which the lead animal telegraphs not only carries over a distance of three miles but is effective even at a distance of a hundred and twenty-five miles. If, for instance, I had an encounter with a party of quartermasters who were then some forty miles away from the herd the herd received the news at once. In such a case I need not wait for the herd to appear. I knew this was futile. When I got back to my men who had remained with the herd, they reported to me that at such an hour they gave the exact time when to the sun the herd had suddenly run off. In a brief instant the end of its flight coincided with the moment of my clash with the quartermasters.

But one ride soon convinced me. Now always know exactly where my mother child, yet he never follows her when she is lost. After it has been kidnapped, as I have supposed, she will appear from a completely different direction and by this she will steer straight for the point where her calf is standing. On one occasion I dared not expose my men or animals to a trip through the bare, waterless valley and was, therefore, forced to remain in the vicinity of Lake Chilka. Had I been able to move out of the normal range of the depredants I would have been safe and need not have expected any attacks from the cow. Once a calf has been removed from the mother's roaming grounds a cow will renounce her child, as I discovered in other regions also.

Attacks by an avenging mother elephant take place, in most cases, during the night. They are more terrifying than anything I experienced in my work with the

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

elephants. You spend the night trying with feverish eyes to penetrate the darkness, everyone is ready to jump at a moment's notice, day dawns at last and, completely worn out and exhausted, you start off on the day's march with your baby elephant. You are convinced that the cow has given up all idea of attacking you. The little elephant is unable to march in the hot, flickering air – then the unexpected comes to pass. . . . '*Komoon!*' (The attack is at hand!)

On the occasion I just mentioned, all of us – myself, my headman, and my boys – would have sworn that the danger was over and that the cow would no longer come. All of us were wrong. Just when we least expected it, suddenly, out of the blue, came the attack. How does an elephant mother know so exactly where her calf is to be found? The riddle is still unsolved. Is it possible that even a four-week-old baby elephant is able to 'telegraph'? It seems almost incredible.

Another incident which also completely puzzled me was explained during my second year at Lake Chad. On two previous occasions, having reached the vicinity of the herd, I ordered my boys to set up camp. When I went to look for the elephants, however, I could not find them although I knew the herd was only three or four hundred yards away. I was positive of their being close by, yet there was no sign of them. A ~~thing~~ like that is enough to drive a man crazy. There, right in front of me, was the place where the herd had stood; here, only a minute ago, there were two hundred elephants – and now they had all vanished into thin air. No matter how often I circled the place, I could not find a single track leading off from it. It was as if I had been tricked by my own senses.

## SCENT AND TELEPATHY

Sometime after this incident, I was marching to my station in the bush and had not the slightest intention of bothering about elephants when in the cold, grey dawn of the second day I found myself travelling barely a hundred yards from a herd that was still staying at the shore of Lake Chad. Freezing, I sat on my horse's back telling myself, 'You're not going to go into that cold water to-day.' And I rode by and let the elephants be, a decision which required a lot of self-control. My boys couldn't understand me and shook their heads in astonishment. Bukhari climbed a tree in order to be able to look out over the dune.

I looked around and saw him up in the tree indulging in the strangest gymnastics. Soon I understood that he was attempting to signal to me. I returned at a gallop. Halfway up the dune I stopped and stood up on my horse's back, from which vantage point I was able to see over the crest of the dune. And there I caught my elephants at their smartest trick. The entire herd had left its resting place and, turning around, was negotiating the last sixty yards by walking backwards into Lake Chad; even the elephant children were forced by their mothers into this backward march. The manoeuvre made for lots of fun and lots of fights. Quietly I saluted the elephants for this last prank, which ~~was~~ was a masterpiece. Yet I should not be at all surprised if these great beasts were capable of other feats of intelligence surpassing even this one.

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL THEIR CHILDREN

ON A BITTERLY cold morning, in a burning forest, part of which extended to the shores of Lake Chad, I suddenly ran into one of the three elephant herds which lived on this western side of the shore. The Hamatan wind, which had set in the previous evening, had driven the veld fire through the forest during the night.

The herd was still some distance from us when we ran into one of its patrolling sentinels. Although eight pairs of eyes had been glued to the bare, blackened plain on which only a few trees grew singly and far apart, not one of my men had seen the sentry in time. Naturally, none of us was expecting to find the elephants in the midst of a burning forest; besides, I had not followed in the tracks of the herd as usual but, alerted by the crashes I had heard during the night, I had simply obeyed my instincts and had set off in the direction of the burning forest.

The first intimation I had that we were in danger was when all my boys went racing past me. Only Bukhari II stopped beside me for a moment, pointing behind him with his thumb, and I heard – or rather read his lips – as he whispered the one word '*Komoon*'.

There were still forty yards between us and the elephant and as yet he could not see us. Luckily, a sharp wind was blowing from him across to us, so he could not smell us either.

My boys had run off to the right; I went in the oppo-

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

site direction. A moment later the elephant reached the spot where we had separated. He ran a few yards beyond it, then stopped, weaving his trunk in the air so that he could first of all make sure of the direction in which we had disappeared. I made use of this breathing spell to creep up close to him. Another twenty yards and I would have him in profile, just a little from behind, presented to me on a silver platter. He let his trunk drop, smelled at the ground, and as the scent came from two different directions, probably did a little hard thinking in an effort to decide which trail he should follow.

I pressed the trigger. Without a sound, the heavy body keeled over sideways, landing with a dull thud in the dark, ashy ground of the burned veld. A clean kill almost always produces this effect: the animals sway as if they are being lifted from the ground, then collapse. Sometimes, they sink on to their knees as if they had had a sudden attack of weakness.

My boys came running back in a great hurry, each one praying silently that he would be the one that day to get the fat entrails, for the natives are as greedy as animals for these parts. I had made my decision: to-day Bukhari II deserved the reward for his discovery. The lucky winner had the privilege of selecting a partner with whom he had to go halves. I had settled that long ago, for a job of this size needed two men. As a rule, the winner tried to cheat his partner and to let him have only a small part of his prize, so that in the end there was always a lot of bickering and I would have to intervene to restore peace.

As always, Bukhari chose the silent Colo, for Colo was generous by nature and made no objection to being

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

cheated. The two men, equipped with spearheads that had been removed from their shafts, fell upon the giant belly of the elephant, and after ten minutes both their torsos had disappeared from view. When Bukhari had divided the booty, very much to his own advantage, he hung both his and Colo's share under a tree to dry, arranging his own portion so artfully that it looked much smaller than it really was. I promptly decreed that the portions had to be exchanged so that now Colo had the bigger share. That was Bukhari's punishment for cheating. It had happened before, and each time he would fall on to his knees, begging and praying, and calling on Allah to enlighten me, the heathen, and make me see that it was not a sin but an honest transaction, even a duty, for a man to divide things to his own advantage.

With the remaining six boys, I set off for the burning woods in order to set up camp in some shady spot. When we reached the forest, the picture that met my eyes came as a shock – it contradicted all the rules of elephant behaviour. The entire herd, divided into groups, stood among the fires made by the burning, fallen trees.

It is a hard-and-fast rule that not only a patrolling sentinel but any elephant who gets wind of an enemy or catches sight of him must at once report to the herd. In the second place, once the signal has been given, the herd supposedly moves off at a run; and third, the herd is completely silent during this entire manoeuvre. Now I could not make head or tail of what I saw before me.

It must have been past ten o'clock. The sun was still veiled by the fog that the Hamatan had generated,

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

and the east wind was sharp and cutting as it swept over the burned and blackened plain. My boys wrapped the remnants of their tattered blue and white garments around their eyes, mouths, and noses, to protect them from the cloud of ash that was driven high into the sky by the wind. As for the colour of skin, we were now all the same sooty black. My boys were as frightened as I was and they stood silent and trembling, watching the elephants warming themselves at tree fires. The woods, lit up by the flames, looked like a huge gutted room. A few trees, defying the fire, stood isolated, like charred pieces of furniture, but they could not distract the eye from the picture of devastation that stretched out all around us. The whole scene struck me as ideal for my capturing plans.

I ordered the boys to go back to the veld and to send back Bukhari and Colo, for these two were the only ones who, under certain conditions, dared hold on to a young elephant. Shu had grown very thin and he now looked as if the slightest breath of wind might knock him down. At the sight of his dull and lustreless eyes, which had once been so full of spirit, I put a whole pound of lump sugar into his leather feed bag. He thanked me with a happy neighing.

We had plenty of time, for I knew that the elephants would wait for the sun to break through the clouds before leaving the warm woods for the cold water.

Bukhari and Colo arrived and I sent them off in the direction of Lake Chad. Then I mounted Shu and we headed north, riding through the woods that extended into the shallow water of the lake shore. My idea was to head the herd away from the lake, but I had to do this without their either seeing or hearing me.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

I was afraid they would pick up my scent, because I had to ride with the wind for some time, but everything was quiet. Never before had I seen a herd of elephants so carefree and serene, as they stood there warming themselves at their fires. In part this was due to the fact that the conflagration and the fires that were still blazing had chased away the swarm of blood-sucking insects and flies which ordinarily drive the elephants, who are very vulnerable to their small pricks, into continuous, restless motion. Also, because of the fire and smoke, my scent could not get through to them.

I decided to take the herd by surprise. A group of three adult animals and two young ones presented me with an ideal opportunity, but I knew that I must act quickly, as a chance of this kind would not last long.

So I gathered up the reins, gave Shu a serious talking to, and off we went, full gallop at the little isolated group. When we got to within fifteen yards of them, Shu sat back on his hindquarters like a trained dog while I made my presence known with a loud scream. As if they were on parade and had been given the command 'Shoulder arms!' the animals all lifted their trunks into the air at the same moment. Then, enveloped in a cloud of black ash, a hundred elephants, losing their heads completely, dashed away, stamping off in a westerly direction. My boys now had an opportunity to run themselves warm. I urged Shu on to give his all, to carry on for another two or three minutes only.

Behind the herd, like an iron curtain, hung a black cloud screening the animals completely from my sight. Experience had taught me to foresee how a herd would

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

react to a situation of this kind, and I had made a rule for myself: 'Attack a herd only once head on; if you try to cut off its escape a second time, it will run you down without mercy.' But on this morning that rule, too, was broken.

After barely thirty seconds the elephants made a right-about turn. As I could see absolutely nothing, I was not aware of their tactics until Shu and I had landed right in the midst of the herd. There was nothing I could do - I had to leave everything to Shu. I gave him a free rein and held on tight so that, no matter what crazy capers he might cut, I wouldn't fly out of the saddle.

Shu stood stock-still: he froze like a bundle of taut steel coils. It was as if he were getting ready for one supreme leap that would take him right over the great, heaving mass of flesh into the sunlight that was so high above us, beyond the clouds.

When in flight, elephants move at the rate of about ten miles an hour. That morning Shu showed me what a horse can do, even when he has to run backwards. By this manoeuvre he extricated himself from one group, climbing and wheeling, only to run into another one.

I knew from experience that this headlong confusion would not last long, and, sure enough, after a few minutes the disorganized groups who had been fleeing in utter distraction suddenly reorganized themselves into orderly formations. Now Shu and I were in real danger. I could tell from Shu's frantic leaps that on the periphery the herd was already consolidating. If only there had been a little light I could have found a gap for us to break through. But I could do nothing, and poor Shu had to run backwards through the entire

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

herd, which delayed our escape for some seconds.

When the crisis was over, the herd did not go directly into the lake but walked along the shore for a few miles, wading through the shallow water in an easterly direction. Only then did I find the single, broad track through the reeds which showed me that the herd was reunited once more and was moving off in good order.

At this point, the shore of Lake Chad ends in a dune-like elevation from which one can get a good view over the whole wide sea of reeds. Luckily, I knew the place pretty well so I realized that behind the reeds lay a big lake, eighteen to twenty feet deep, which the elephants would be forced to swim across. Had I wanted to follow the herd, I would first have had to build a *kadai* (a papyrus boat), an undertaking of at least two hours. But the lake gave me a new opportunity. Since mother elephants don't take their smallest babies on swimming parties of this kind, but hide in the reeds close to the shore, each mother and child by itself, here was my chance to make a catch.

It is, however, quite impossible to see these cows hiding singly among the reeds even when, as was the case this time, I was high up on Shu.

'If only a few herons would fly in,' I thought, and let my eyes sweep up and down over the sky. Herons like to settle near elephants. My wish was promptly granted. Five herons flew in, alighting in the reeds right under my nose. Bukhari, Momodo, and Colo, who were standing next to me, were struck dumb with astonishment, as was I. The first cow was so close to us that we could not understand how we had failed to see her before. She was browsing in the reeds only eighty yards off shore. I waded out to her immediately, just

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

as I was, with only the short towline that I happened to have around my neck. The water was very deep at this place, so I half swam as I worked my way forward in the opening that the elephants had left behind. I had no trouble finding the place where the cow had branched off from the main track. Suddenly I heard a completely strange voice calling a warning to me. Later I found it was a Fula man who had joined my boys during my absence. His horses had run away and he had been following their tracks in an effort to get them back.

He had hardly screamed when the cow was already breaking through the wall of reeds that separated us and I had barely enough time to duck under water and get out of her way. You have to have luck sometime, and I had plenty of it that day. Nothing untoward happened. On the contrary. Emerging from the deep water, I saw a dark grey, velvety back in front of me and next to this entrancing sight the small, weaving tip of a trunk sticking up out of the water. Two small elephants had broken through the reed wall with their mother. They were not in the least frightened. The smaller one, especially, although I was paying very little attention to him, made a real nuisance of himself. Over-demonstrative in his display of affection, he would lay his trunk around my neck and shoulders and trample around on my feet until my heels were sore and my one wish was that the devil would take him. The bigger elephant baby, however, growled at me belligerently and with juvenile impudence prepared to run me down, a mode of behaviour that he copied from his elders. But when I did not retreat and countered with an angry growling similar to his own, he

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

turned abruptly and ran off along the shore, keeping to the broad track that led to the dune.

Open-mouthed, my boys were waiting there, ready to receive the two small elephants. I signalled to them to get out of the way, a command which they obeyed readily. They had great respect for the elephant calf which was racing along ahead of me, looking bigger than it actually was because it was running on level ground. Probably the boys would have run off in any case, but I was afraid the elephant might turn around if he saw a crowd of men in front of him, and I had given the order knowing well that it would have been quite impossible for me to hold on to the animal single-handed.

When I reached the shallow water, I took a few leaps to land right behind the bigger of the two elephants and, grabbing him by the tail tassel, I let him pull me up the dune at a fast clip. I wanted to tire him out so that it would be easier to handle him. While this race was going on, some of the boys began to scream and, taking a quick look behind me, I saw the old mother elephant racing hell-bent after me. She wanted to retrieve her offspring but, first of all, she intended to square accounts with the kidnapper. My boys, who had been ready to come to my assistance, now stood still and stared. Only the reliable Colo, ignoring the protests of the others, sprang fearlessly to my aid. He grabbed the tail tassel out of my hand and disappeared over the dune on to the veld. I ran back quickly in order to have it out with the mother elephant and also to deflect her attention from her child. I managed to do this by letting her have a good look at me and by screaming at her ferociously. One rule, which proves

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

itself again and again with each new attack, is that a cow will first of all attack her enemy; she will not go for her child until she is sure that her foe has been destroyed.

As I wanted to give my boys a chance to get away safely, I couldn't afford to let the cow out of my sight for a good long while, so I played hide-and-seek with her until about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Completely exhausted by my crazy day, I threw myself down on the dune under a tree. In spite of everything I was pleased with my day's work and I kept thinking of my boys romping safely over the veld with the little elephant. All I wanted now was a short rest, and then, as long as the light lasted, I would follow the tracks of my boys, who, if they were still masters of the situation, must have set off in the direction of the small village of Baga.

I was therefore more than a little surprised to see the rascals come tramping out of the woods in high good humour. In their midst trudged the smaller of the two little elephants, but the bigger one was nowhere to be seen! My good humour vanished. The morning's ride, the set-to with the cow, and now 'his! If you restrain a young elephant he will give an angry growl or two, bellow, and toss his thick head from side to side – and this bluff had been enough to frighten the boys into letting him escape! By now I had had enough of trying to raise the small nurslings, so I ordered the boys to return the little elephant to his mother, and ended the day empty-handed.

It would still be daylight for another two hours, and I decided to make use of the time to find the path which would lead me to my station in the bush, about

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

thirty miles away. In parting, I impressed on my boys that I expected them to join me there in two days. The last day had cost me so much in nervous energy that I needed a little time to rest and recuperate. Shu also needed a rest, but for him it was to be a matter of months rather than days. I mounted Shu and rode off.

Complete darkness had fallen and I had not found the path that was to give me my direction. I – or rather Shu – had already negotiated a couple of out-lying lakes successfully, but now we were wandering around, lost in a thick forest. We had finally managed to traverse this and I had taken a breath of relief when Shu suddenly stopped short, pricked up his stiff ears, turned and looked me full in the face, his eyes glowing feverishly in the darkness.

What could I say to the poor animal? I had no directions to give him and he would have to make his own decisions. But Shu knew what to do. He simply turned around and headed back into the forest. I could not, however, agree with this solution for it made me shudder even to think of going back into that darkness where I knew from sad experience that the thorns would tear my skin to shreds.

‘No, Shu,’ I said, ‘any other place, but not the woods,’ and I forced him out on to the plain that lay before us. After barely thirty yards we suddenly sank into a deep swamp. Drained of courage and strength, resigned to his fate, and refusing to move an inch, Shu settled into the swamp. Never before had he given up that way.

Neither entreaties, commands, nor the whip had any effect. In despair I got behind him and pushed. All that did was make me sink into the swamp and I

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

had to pull myself up by Shu's tail. That caused him to sink deeper. After many desperate and unsuccessful tries, I at last left Shu where he was and worked my way back to the edge of the woods. There I sat down in my wet, clinging clothes, shivering in every limb.

Things could not go on like this. I got up, snapped my fingers and clicked my tongue at Shu in order to encourage him to fight his way through to me. I could no longer see him, but I could hear his hoarse neighing. Again and again I called him by name, his deep and increasingly courageous neighing echoing back to me. Suddenly, there was a rustling in the underbrush and Shu was back. Tenderly, as though he were a girl, I patted my poor, exhausted horse. I was so happy to have him back. How would I ever have managed without his help? In the meantime, day had come and I still had a whole day's ride ahead of me.

Late that evening, Shu stood in front of my grass hut and, neighing weakly, invited me to dismount. I gave him a banquet that night, two tins of Quaker Oats mixed with a whole pound of sugar. This was the first time I had ever given Shu such a treat, for I needed the oats to feed my animal children and, never knowing how many of them I would be called on to rear, I had to watch my supply of oats very carefully. But because of his great feat that night, Shu had earned the right to priority over all others.

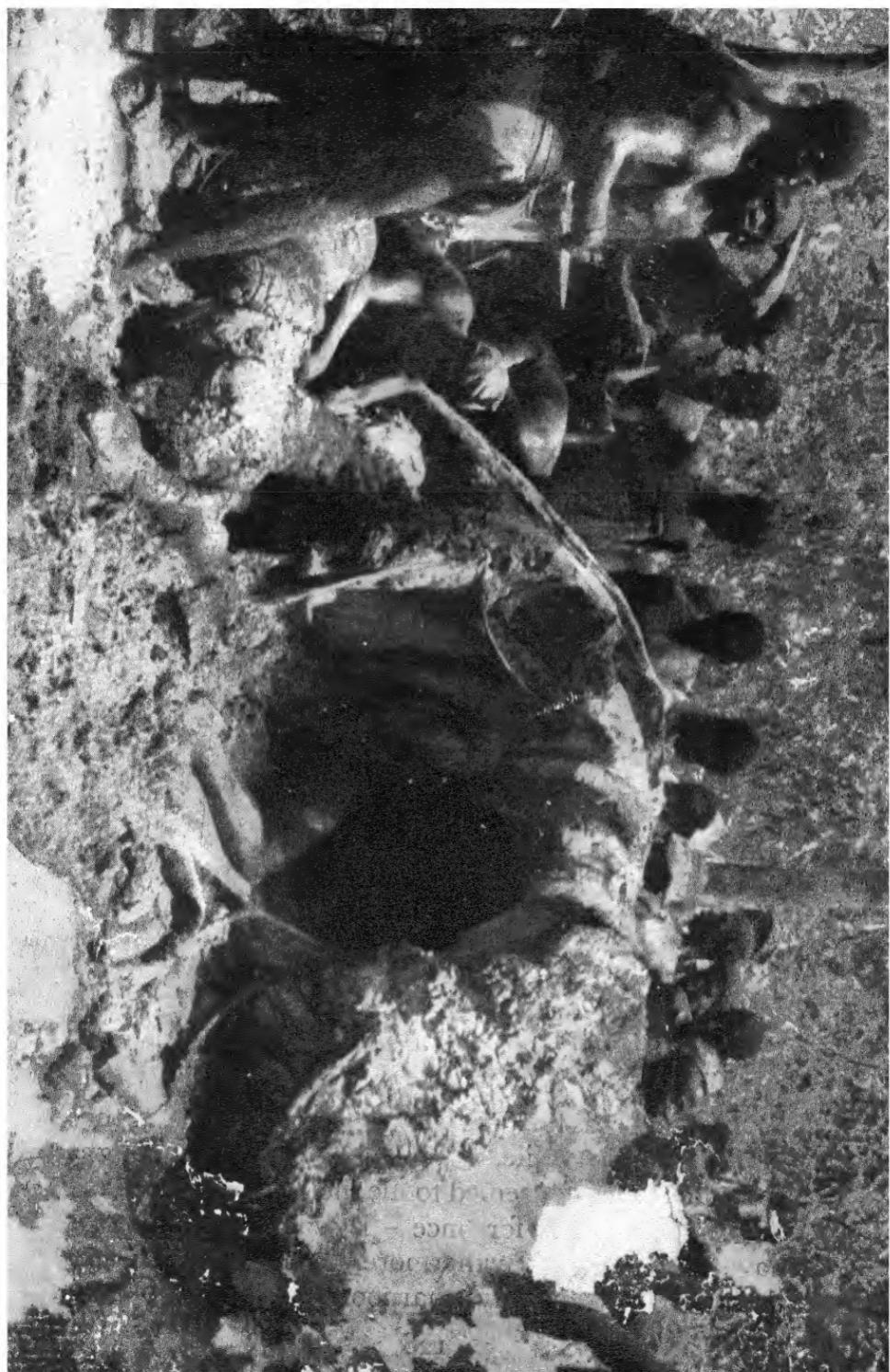
On the following day my boys arrived at the bush station. They came in single file and were obviously in high spirits, laughing and talking. They had every reason to be in good humour, for that very morning I had shot twenty fat wild birds for them so that they

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

would sit down to brimming fleshpots. After a good night's sleep, I too had recovered my spirits.

But when the boys came to my hut and I saw that four of them were holding their spears turned the wrong way round and that they had four small elephant feet impaled on them, my good humour vanished instantly. (Here in the bush, the natives always carry their spears so that they are ready for an attack, i.e., pointing forward. If they make a kill, the game is impaled on the spear and the spear is carried with the shaft toward the front.)

I was dumbfounded. I had given the boys explicit orders to return the small elephant to his mother and instead it seemed that they had slaughtered him and had feasted on his body. I had every right to be angry. In addition, I still bore them a grudge for their cowardice of the day before when they let the older of the two elephants, already an independent feeder, escape. The men could not have been hungry. It is true that I had not been able to shoot in the morning because of the proximity of the elephants and perhaps I should have shot them a supply of meat for their cooking pots before I left the night before. But all that was beside the point. Every day they were supplied with the best of food, delicacies which they would otherwise never have tasted, for there was a quantity of game at Lake Chad so that I was always bagging birds of all sorts, wild geese, ducks, and other fowl. Once in a while, of course, a meatless day might come in, but still they might have taken this in. They could certainly not have killed the elephant if they were hungry. They could easily have had some fish, and,





## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

finally, if they were too busy to do that, there was a small fishing village less than ten miles away. There, for a half-penny, they could have bought enough fish to stuff their bellies to the bursting point.

All this went through my mind in a few seconds. Another thing that I remembered was that they all had three weeks' pay with them, which, by native standards, amounted to a small fortune. They did not even have their favourite excuse '*Congonu babu*' - (No money). There was no conceivable reason for having slaughtered the tiny elephant.

The sight of those little elephant feet put me into such a blind fury that I grabbed my hippopotamus whip and personally thrashed the four culprits. Ibrahim, the headman, and Bukhari opened their mouths to speak; their words seemed to voice innocence and total incomprehension, but in my rage all I understood was '*cura komoon*' (big elephant).

One should never act in a fit of rage but rather sleep on one's anger for a night. That is a cardinal rule, particularly for a white man dealing with natives. Remorse cannot undo an act committed in blind anger.

The next morning the headman, Ibrahim, and the four accused appeared before me, protesting their innocence. They told me that soon after I had left the mother elephant had appeared and had herself led her calf.

I gave them no definite answer but dismissed them with the single word '*To*' (Good). I thought about the affair all day and wondered whether there was such a thing as an elephant mother killing her child and, if so, under what circumstances she would

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

happen. My only explanation was that there existed some crazy cows. The first three elephants that we had captured and returned to their mothers had not been killed, which seemed proof enough that my boys had lied. I was convinced that they had slaughtered the baby elephant themselves.

In the evening I sent for the four culprits and informed them that we were going to start the very next morning on another capturing expedition, in order to find out whether or not they had been telling the truth. If they were proven right, each man would receive a big present; if not, they would have deserved their punishment. The headman was commissioned to take Shu to the Arab Chief for a rest and to bring back the big horse that was there now.

It was the seventh of February, 1938 – I can't forget the date, because it was my birthday – when, in the dark grey of early dawn, I succeeded once more in cutting a herd off the Lake Chad route.

Standing on the bare back of my horse, clinging to his slippery hide with soft, rubber-soled shoes, I could look out over the high steppe grass and admire the giant animals as they came toward me. With the exception of a twelve-year-old boy, everyone had run off. I would not be able to get my stallion close to the herd, and I had brought my shotgun so that I could fire off an alarm signal; if the gun were to get in my way while I was making a catch, I would simply throw it on the ground and, later on, when my boys were following the tracks, they would find it easily.

My plans were made in an instant. I would bring my horse as close as possible to the herd, give the elephants a chance to pick up my scent, then, as quickly as

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

possible, I would fire a half-dozen shots. Everything worked according to plan. The herd took to its heels at the first shots, not in headlong confusion this time, but in orderly formation. At such a pace, the cows would have to leave a few of their nurslings behind.

Sure enough, after a little while I saw some of the elephants separating themselves from the herd and coming to a standstill. They took the scent carefully in every direction, very much on the alert. These were the cows who had lost their calves in the confusion. There were five of them, so I knew that five motherless baby elephants must be roaming around very close to me.

If I couldn't manage to catch one of them in the course of the morning it would be really bad luck. I jumped quickly back on to my stallion and searched the vicinity feverishly for the small elephants. Suddenly my horse bolted in terror. I shot over his head, landing in the high grass, where I was almost run down by a young elephant. The inquisitive little fool stood stock-still, staring admiringly at the first human being he had ever seen. To my disgust the fellow was much too big to suit me; he must have been at least 1 year and a half old.

'I'll never manage him by myself,' I thought. 'I hope the boys don't leave me in the lurch.' But in spite of these thoughts I leaped on to the back of the elephant, clawing my fingers into his ears and throwing my legs around his soft, round belly in an iron grip. With this unwelcome load clamped on to his back, he darted off like a runaway horse. Thank God he did not choose the direction in which the herd had fled, for in that case I would have had no choice but to get off his back.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

Naturally, it was impossible to foretell in which direction he would race in order to rid himself of this dangerous creature, man.

He raced through a broad depression in which some water still remained and made for a burned-out, black stretch of veld. This natural depression had served as a barrier which had blocked the fire from getting through to the other side. When we got there, the little elephant came to a sudden stop, standing perfectly quiet like a circus pony which has done its stunt and is waiting patiently for its rider to dismount. 'He can wait a long time,' I thought, for I had no intention of getting down from my soft, comfortable seat of my own accord.

Discovering that the load on his back did not move, the young elephant decided to do something about it. He shook himself violently and, when that brought no results, he threw up his head, trumpeted loudly and angrily, and started off on a new course. I was not at all enthusiastic about this loud trumpeting, for I feared that the young elephant's mother, should she be near enough to hear, might interpret it as a cry for help - which, of course, it was.

We raced back the way we had come. By this time we looked like a pair of chimney sweeps because of the ashy dust which was whirled high by the rising wind.

The little elephant came to a stop just before we reached the depression again. I was already rejoicing at the thought that my pet (for I considered him my pet in spite of the fact that I was being so harsh with him) was running short of breath when suddenly he got the idea of lowering his head and pushing it down

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

between his front legs. Rounding his back into a semi-circle, as if he were an armadillo, he rolled over his big head and back.

That was typical young elephant behaviour and I was only surprised that until now I had been spared pranks of this kind, for, of course, I was forced to relinquish the rider's seat at once.

All this happens so quickly and smoothly that one has hardly time to dismount in an orderly fashion; the best I could manage was to let myself slide down sideways so as not to be squashed under the rolling elephant. Now man and elephant were lying on the ground, stretched out full length, side by side. As the man doesn't take part in the rolling, his head always lands near the elephant's hindquarters and, if he is quick, he can grab hold of the animal's tail tassel. In an attempt to get on to his feet and escape from his tormentor, the elephant always rolls sideways, which is very lucky for the rider, who otherwise would land under the elephant's feet. During this really funny little manoeuvre, executed so easily and skilfully by the young elephant that I myself found it highly amusing, the elephant was always able to beat me in getting to his feet.

On this morning, too, I hung on to the elephant's tail tassel. Lying on my back, with my head raised, I let him drag me through the ashes into the muddy depression; I could afford to join in a sleighing party of this kind, because on occasions such as this I always wore a home-made suit of strong gazelle hide. When we reached the depression — opposite us was the high, dry, as yet unburned veld — I sank down into the mud and so I had to let go of the little elephant's tail tassel.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

I hated to make this decision because I knew it meant losing my pet.

Once more everything had gone wrong. When I let go of his tail, however, the elephant child stood still and looked at me in a pitying way as if he wanted to say, 'Can't you hold on a little longer? We're almost there now.' And when I was on my feet again, he turned around as if he wanted to offer me his back so that I could more easily grab hold of his tail tassel. I was very close to accepting this generous invitation when a sudden, instinctive feeling of fear made me hold back.

At that moment (in encounters of this kind it is always a question of seconds, each one of which seems like an eternity) the old cow stepped suddenly out of the high grass opposite me into the gully in which I was lying. I jumped back quickly in an instinctive move to get myself out of the sticky mud and took a look around me. Everything was as if bewitched. The cow certainly must have had my scent but, ignoring it, she went at once to her child. She was very calm, and this quiet behaviour on her part was something I could not understand. There were only a few yards now between mother and child. When the child discovered his mother had come for him, he ran to her full of happy anticipation, overjoyed to see her again after all the terrors he had been through. Immediately there was a great crash, and mother and child disappeared in an eruption of mud. When, after a while, it was possible to see clearly again, I watched the enraged cow running off without her calf. Later I found the elephant child buried in the mud, trampled to death by its own mother.

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

That was the end of the story and the first positive proof I had that mother elephants sometimes kill their children.

I now abandoned the theory that this phenomenon could take place only in isolated instances when a crazy cow was involved. I had been deeply impressed by the cow's behaviour as she faced her newly recovered calf. After a lot of thinking I came to this conclusion: Our first three calves were captured while they were standing in deep water and, of these, not a single one was killed by its mother. This must have been due to the fact, I reasoned, that in deep water the human scent could not cling to them, whereas, at this catch, the calf was captured on dry land and therefore it must have been contaminated with my smell. When the calf suddenly stood before his mother, in her state of blind rage and excitement she must have thought that it was her enemy and not her child that confronted her. In her terror and fury she had made a mistake in identity and, without meaning to, had trampled her own baby to death. That, at any rate, was my theory.

In order to prove that my hypothesis was a valid one, I undertook a further capture. This time I caught a small elephant in deep water, brought him back to land, and there returned him to his mother. This calf, too, was killed. On many future occasions my theory proved to be correct. Even when a young animal was caught while it was standing in water that was shallow enough to leave half or two-thirds of its body exposed, if the exposed part of its body was in contact with myself or my boys, it was invariably killed by its mother.

Again and again, however, just when I thought the observations I had made were watertight, the elephants

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

would do something that would prove me wrong. So one day, as I stood by puzzled, a mother did not kill her calf even though the conditions were exactly as in all the previous cases. Before the life of wild elephants is studied on a much larger scale, it will be dangerous to predict their behaviour with any degree of accuracy.

Probably there is no man who has had as many hand-to-hand encounters with wild elephants as I had. For at Lake Chad conditions were such that I had no other choice unless I was willing to go home empty-handed. In spite of tremendous odds, however, I am still alive, which is more than I could expect after my initial experiences with raging elephants. By contrast, many hunters who have stalked their quarry, armed with high-powered rifles, have been attacked and trampled to death. I could cite many incidents of this kind. Often I was trapped in swamps and in the midst of closely grown, rod-like grass, each spear almost an inch thick and hard as a board. The only way to cross this barrier was to keep to the paths that the elephants and hippopotami had made. Unable to move an inch, I would be forced to sit tight, imprisoned between these armoured walls. On several occasions I collided in such a situation with elephants, in two dramatic instances with wounded elephants who had collapsed and could not regain their feet. Yet I escaped unhurt. I have said before that the elephant can be a generous animal; now I repeat this statement with the amplification that not only *can* he be generous, he *is* generous. An experience to which my headman, Ibrahim, was witness and which left him with a tremor of the head for the rest of his life may serve as an illustration.

My boys were always begging me to let them come

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

along on my forays so that they, too, could see the elephants. Whenever a good opportunity arose, I would take one of them along. On one particular day, it was Ibrahim's luck to be with me. We had lost a lot of time searching for the elephant and hippopotamus tracks which we needed to lead us to the herd, so that, just as we had reached it, the herd was already breaking up for its midday siesta. Ibrahim and I had entered the papyrus swamp at an unlucky moment, for the herd cut off our retreat. We were unable to step off the path on either side and we were pressed tight against the impassable barrier of hard, spiky grass. As we cowered trembling with fright the huge, powerful, peaceful animals, walking in close single file, sauntered slowly by only about eight or ten yards away from us. As we could not stay under water indefinitely, I had no hope of coming out safe and sound from this adventure. And sure enough, the seventh or eighth elephant took a great interest in us helpless human beings. We wondered what was going on in his mind and the unpleasant thought came to us that probably he would decide to trample us to death. Without further reasoning, I hauled my gun above the water and tipped the barrel for a second so that the water could run out of it. Then I fire blindly at the broad chest of the animal, who was now standing right in front of us. Since then, I have often asked myself what made me act so hastily. I think I can rightly answer that I was unnerved by the fact that at my side a man was getting frantic at the thought of dying. Ibrahim had gone out of his mind. It was harrowing to hear his screams and to watch him try to break through the thick reed wall. Suddenly, sensing his own impotence,

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

he ceased screaming and, looking wildly about him, tore off a broken reed and thus armed ran toward the grey colossus who was standing only five yards away from us.

It was then that I fired blindly at the giant beast. He sank slowly down on to his knees and a second later we were all but drowned in the fountains of water that were churned up by his fall. As it happened, however, this was a great piece of luck for us. I dropped my own gun and grabbed Ibrahim's. By this time he had calmed down enough to allow me to hold on to him; all he did was to keep on shaking his head and moaning, 'Oh - oh - oh - oh - oh - oh.' My shot caused the herd to rush off with the usual uproar. The wounded elephant lay in front of us, forming a protecting wall which the departing herd had to detour as if it were a great rock lying half submerged in the water.

After the last elephants had gone, I was about to take hold of Ibrahim's arm and lead him away when the inevitable happened. An animal that has collapsed from a shot in the lungs always gets up again after a while, and this one did just that. Except for his continual moaning and the tremor of his head, Ibrahim was quiet; I don't believe he was conscious of what was going on. Both of us were standing under the giant body, and we were now covered by a stream of blood that came gushing out of the still-pumping heart. I had to turn aside to avoid getting the first stream right in my face. Grumbling softly, the elephant lifted his trunk, waved it back and forth a few times over our heads, turned, and went staggering on for a good hundred yards before he collapsed and died.

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

But to return to my bargain with the four boys. I was doubly indebted to them – I had punished them unjustly and it was they who had drawn my attention to the interesting fact that mother elephants sometimes kill their offspring. I felt that the time had come to give them the reward I had promised them and which they had well earned. I decided I would give each of them four shillings and a cloak which for them takes the place of a complete outfit.

They were delighted with the presents and departed jubilantly. I thought that now everything was in fine order and that I had made up for the wrong I had done them. But I was soon to learn differently. Led by an old man and talking earnestly, a procession of men and women arrived at my hut. Ibrahim was the spokesman for the delegation. He told me that these people felt that, as they all worked for me, they were as much entitled to a reward as were the four who had already received one. That was overdoing it. I scanned the crowd facing me: there stood an old Berberi man whose 'work' consisted in delivering a pail of milk every morning for a nursing antelope and other young animals; to my certain knowledge he had received his pay in advance at the beginning of each week. I recognized two women who had once pounded some millet for me; near them stood a small boy who had once acted as shepherd for the cows who had long since left us. Every one of these people had been paid well and had been given presents in addition.

There were many others, people who had had no connection of any kind either with me or with my affairs. I swallowed my annoyance and told Ibrahim to tell them that I had flogged none of them with the

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

*bullala* (whip) and that, besides, there were many among them who had not worked for me for a long while. Old Mallam, to whom my words were translated, demanded that I catch up immediately on the punishment so that, as he insisted, 'everything would be all right'. It is useless to describe the flood of talk that went back and forth between us, but my resolution not to be party to any such crazy nonsense as they proposed was shattered by their unanimous demand for the punishment that, they felt, would justly entitle them to a reward.

Finally, I gave in and ordered Bukhari to give every one of them fifteen strokes of the *bullala*. Rejoicing in their victory, eighteen men and women, old and young, jockeyed for position, shoving each other out of the way as they threw themselves down in the sand.

There they lay, in the glorious morning sunlight, eighteen naked human beings, men and women, waiting to be whipped so that they could collect the presents to which they felt they would then have as much right as the four men originally punished.

Just as Bukhari was about to begin, I called to him to stop. Believing that I had changed my mind, all eighteen jumped to their feet, outraged and scolding. Old Mallam planted himself in front of me, angrily demanding the promised punishment, while in a long harangue he invoked Allah's wrath against me. I paid no attention to anybody, for I was determined to put an end to this ridiculous business. Going over to the money chest, I opened it and ordered Bukhari to pay out four shillings to each man and woman there. In addition, I told them to send a tailor from their village

## MOTHER ELEPHANTS SOMETIMES KILL

and to him I turned over enough cheap white material to make a cloak for each man and a big wrap for each woman. The tailor finished his work in five days, and that finally put an end to the affair of the 'Elephant Mothers Who Kill Their Children'.

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

FOR THE SPONGEWOOD now we had been without a rainstorm for a month, I began to wonder if the rainy season could possibly be over by mid-October this year. If that were the case, then I could say good-bye to the grey-green skin of a tent and to the four tent bearers. I would have to dismiss them all, for I had to save every shilling possible. My backer was Carlo Hagenbeck and I had plenty of financial worries, which were not mine also. I was proud of the confidence he placed in me and I was determined, if it was humanly possible, to give him the high return on his investment that he was expecting. We were poor in foreign exchange but in spite of this we wanted results, even if it meant miserly watching of every shilling. Nevertheless, it was an undignified battle that had a hampering effect on one's initiative.

With the use of those huge elephant ears which the natives like to use, with my saddle under my head, breasted over all my problems. Two horse blankets were drawn up over my home-made suit of antelope skin. Long ago I had dispensed with my camp bed as a luxury article.

I hate a tent; inside those grey-green walls I always feel that I am in a coffin. For ten months at a time — almost the entire year — I am used, night after night, to looking up into the clear, starry sky, listening to the screams, the hungry wailing, and the love calls of the wild animals, all the humming and the buzzing that

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

makes Nature's orchestration. Here in my tent there was not even the humming of a mosquito.

I could stand it no longer, I had to go outside. I decided to wait just a little while for Shu, who was due to come any minute now for his ration of sugar. Shu hates a tent just as much as I do and in his stubborn, painstaking way he had, after many trials, to undo the fastenings. Now, after two months of practice, it was easy for him . . . in three minutes he could open the tent with his muzzle. And, no matter how dark it was, he could pick out the food locker from all the rest. He lifted the latch with his muzzle and, at the same time, raised the lid. This night, as always when he found the box closed, he turned to me for help, standing on my bed and trying to wake me by nipping me through the blankets and my leather pants. However, his efforts were without success, for I pretended to be asleep. As a last resort he went over to my head and pinched my arm.

'Ouch!' I jumped up, gave him a slap, and opened the box, but he had to help himself to his own sugar. In the process he often demolished the pots and pans with his forelegs. When he had eaten his fill he shoved himself backwards, lay down, and left through the tent entrance. I took a big handful of sugar and hurried after him. Loudly I called, 'Baa!' At the sound of my voice a big, strong stallion appeared; he was still round and well nourished and he gave vent to a deep, satisfied neighing before he ate his sugar out of my hand. His name was Baa, and as I talked to him I stroked his neck, chest, and flanks, pushing aside a bloody mush. 'In a year,' I told him, 'you're going to look just like Shu and me. Then you'll

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

elephant's intelligence, trying to discover the whys and wherfores of their moves. I could speak to no one of these things; one would simply be laughed at. There is one professor, however, with whom I hope to have an argument sometime. 'You can read nothing in an elephant's face,' he wrote, 'neither joy nor anger.' That gentleman should come with me sometime and live away from wild elephants; then he would see that in his dealing only with humanized hypocrites

THE next night I recall it; my mood was sad. I was thinking of the sorry fate of my elephants, turned into dancing clowns by a lame, dismaded and ridiculous people who pretend to share the crowd. Disgusted and hopeless and I rose with a frown.

If the elephants could speak I could not molest them. In such a desolate and sad mood I was in no condition to command a herd of elephants. I tried to talk myself out of a state of blues, perhaps some sort of a condition. What matter if that great elephant had lost his own small light of life? It would not affect me in the least.

It was still dark at four o'clock in the morning. My eyes were closed to the constellations until at last they closed on the faint sphere earth and heaven meet. Then I saw the black wall, the dark wall. Could a better storm be coming this way? In that case, my boys would rejoice, for they would have water.

Suddenly, as if by command, I saw my boys jump up from their resting place beside the camp fire; nervously they took up their mats and their spears, their other worldly possessions, and started running away. Two men stayed behind, - Bukhari and Colo. Bukhari ran to me, screaming as if he had to rouse me

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

from a deep sleep, '*Bature komoon*' (Elephants, sir). I came to life again.

'*Komoon*' – in the wilderness this is a warning that could wake the dead. I was already on my feet, scanning the west where the dark wall had now broken away from the horizon. It had become a part of the earth, a living avalanche composed of hundreds of six-ton bodies. The sight appalled every man. The towel flew off my head, I raced forward, grabbed up my gun and two clips of 3.5 mm. cartridges, threw away the towline around my neck, snatched my tobacco pouch and powdered my reserve pipe. This would be a long hot day.

In a few minutes I was standing watching the moving mountain roll toward the camp. The air was oppressive, laden with the rumble and roar of those heavy bodies, a sound which has a terrifying, an overpowering effect on the human spirit. A mass of living flesh, some twelve hundred tons – directed and led by reasoning intelligence – was headed toward a single man who weighed just a hundred and forty-two pounds. To pit oneself against such strength seemed the height of presumption.

Colo was now the only one who had stayed. Even Bukhari had taken to his heels. 'Who is he? To what race does he belong? Where does he come from?' If anyone had asked me those questions, I would have been unable to answer them. I often asked the same questions of his own people and they, too, could give no information. Colo himself never talked either to me or to his own people. He never hurried; whether I urged him with kind words or with threats, it made no difference. Yet he was by most

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

reliable companion, always at my side in critical moments when I needed someone. If a few of my bearers vanished in the night and I didn't know how to replace them, Colo took over. Without a word, he tied up the baggage and, for days and weeks at a time, shouldered a double or even a triple load.

On this morning, also, Colo was at my side. His disfigured angular face, with its prominent cheek-bones and the ugly, flat nose that is rarely found among the natives of this region, combined with his neck, grotesquely thickened by swollen veins, was not one to inspire trust and confidence. His fingers were short, thick stumps as if they had been eaten away by leprosy or burned off in a fire; in contrast to this almost frightening ugliness, however, his legs were long, slim, and sinewy. A real child of the veld, he had the stamina to walk five miles an hour from sunrise to sunset, and on special occasions he could do even better than that.

I gave him the order to saddle the horse. Standing next to Shu, his rough fingers caressingly stroked the animal's neck. All animals, from day-old antelope to elephants, loved those rough hands, and with both animals and people they were his best means of communication, for his speech was unintelligible as, with teeth clamped tightly together and lips only slightly open, he noisily sucked in the air.

There was no need to waste words with Colo. He knew what it was all about. Now he followed me with Shu at a considerable distance, travelling always against the wind.

Colo did not forget and therefore would not repeat a mistake he had made a year earlier as a consequence

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

of which sixteen human lives hung for a while in a very precarious balance. At the time, I was very angry with him and he was punished severely.

It happened this way. Three combined herds, totaling about two hundred and eighty elephants, had gone to a deep water hole in order to wallow in the mire. In front of the water hole there was a steep, natural platform, sparsely overgrown with bush and old wood, so well formed that it looked as if it had been fashioned by a human hand. It was a perfect grandstand from which to watch a great show staged by Nature.

Unless elephants are disturbed at their wallowing, they will dally over it for at least an hour, if not two. Knowing this, I thought it would be a good opportunity to invite the boys to see this show of Nature, especially as for some time they had been begging me to let them see the elephants at close range. One of the boys was very brash, however, and, unable to control his curiosity, he ventured too close to the herd and was spied by a patrolling bull who immediately challenged him.

I was not present, but when the air was suddenly filled with screams and trumpetings, I had a foreboding that some accident had taken place. Instinctively I screamed at the herd and, in addition, fired off an alarm shot. By this time the elephants had come to know me well so that, hearing my voice, the whole herd moved off at a run and the sentinel bull immediately broke off his attack and raced away with the rest. All this happened so quickly that I had no time to ask myself what I should do next. At moments like this, there is no room for reasoning; the decisive factor is spontaneous, instinctive action.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

All the boys, sixteen of them, were sitting on the 'grandstand', as I had told them to keep at a distance of at least forty to fifty yards from the elephants. I had decided to let them watch the show for half an hour and had been amused to see their astonished, laughing, admiring, and almost devout faces. But things did not work out as I had planned. I had not reckoned that the elephants might move off in our direction, being sure they would prefer the thick forest that lay opposite us. And even if, by some fluke, they should decide to turn in our direction, I had thought I could see them coming in time to issue a polite invitation to my boys to vacate their seats. In any case, they would have made way for the elephants of their own accord, for all of them knew that these giant beasts want human beings to keep their distance.

There was a peculiar heaviness in the air – then suddenly a living avalanche of flesh hurled itself at us. I called to the boys, the first words that came into my head, '*Gudu, maza, maza*' (Run, quick, quick!), but the boys had seen the danger themselves and were already racing up the steep dune, shovelling the loose sand (not real sand at all, but dust-fine, dried-out humus) backwards with their scurrying feet, their lungs pumping as if they would burst. Sixteen people were running for their lives . . . only one man was not allowed to join in this flight, and that man was myself. For, if even one boy were to lose his life during an incident of this kind, my licence would, and rightly so, be revoked.

With a loud yell I leaped forward to meet the avalanche that was rushing toward me. My one hope was to reach a thick, old acacia tree that was close by. Once I got there, I clung to it as if I were part of it,

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

hardly daring to breathe, not venturing to move a muscle or shift a limb.

Miracles still occur, but what took place now was not in the nature of a miracle but the logical outcome of a situation I soon came to realize. The elephants had caught the scent of an enemy in the direction opposite us, and it was because of this that they had retreated in the first place. They had run our way only because the air seemed clear. Now, suddenly, their old enemy, the robber of their children, was screaming at them.

They were caught between enemies and, cleverly, they elected to escape via the two sides that were still free of a foe. Just in front of the tree to which I clung as if glued there, the herd divided, one part going off to the right, the other to the left. A good dozen elephants ran past me and on ahead, however, determined to find their arch-enemy, the man who had had the impudence to scream at them. Twenty-five feet away from me lurked a young bull. He stood as if transfixed, his big ears stiff and standing out at right angles to his head, uncanny and menacing, his trunk lifted high in the air, its tip at an angle, pointed at me, and his small, terrifying eyes opened wide so that the white showed, fixed and flashing.

‘That thing there, that’s glued to the tree, that can’t be the man who is my enemy,’ he must have thought. A second elephant came and stood beside the bull, and he, too, waited there as if transfixed. I do not believe that a man ever grows old enough to forget moments of this kind. Suddenly, a familiar voice rang out, ‘*Kai*’ (You). The natives address every animal in this way, especially when they are annoyed with it and want to correct its behaviour.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

It was one of my horse boys who had been led here by Colo. They stepped out of the woods completely oblivious of the fact that they had plunged a lot of people into a desperate situation. Colo and two boys had followed the herd down wind; this was against my strict orders, because it may endanger lives. Luckily, the two transfixed elephants suddenly came back to life and made off. So this time all of us got away with only a bad fright.

On this particular morning, a year later, when a new elephant herd was coming our way, Colo's deliberate slowness was getting on my nerves. Colo always had time. Not even the menace of an onrushing herd could induce him to hurry. He saddled Shu with the greatest care and circumspection, again and again his rough hands lovingly stroked the horse's neck while he talked constantly to the animal, sucking the air in noisily through his teeth. No one had taught him to act in this way; an innate compassion for all living creatures dictated his conduct.

Finally, Colo bent down, picked up a handful of the finest dust off the ground and, in order to ascertain the direction of the wind, let it fall slowly back to the earth. Then, with Shu, he moved off to the right, in order to let the herd pass him on the left. Now, at last, I could start and I turned right too so that later on, when the elephants would have passed, I could turn off to the left and follow them.

In a short while the twelve-hundred-ton avalanche had rolled by. It was still too dark to undertake anything. Besides, as the elephant sentries do not patrol during the night, I could follow the herd pretty closely.

Now that I was again with the herd, the rest of the

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

world no longer existed for me, Colo was forgotten, only my elephants were real. I thought of nothing else; my whole life centred on them. Every sense, every nerve, had become stimulated to a pitch of feverish activity. When I was a child at school, I was taught that man has five senses, but now I no longer believe that. Man has a hundred senses, perhaps even more. If I were to tell how I feel when I am with a herd of elephants, I could only express my state by saying that I become an elephant myself. I think with his brain and act, quite spontaneously, as he would. Anyone unable to do likewise will always remain an amateur whose only achievement is to shoot holes into an elephant's hide. For me it is not enough to listen to the elephant symphony, to understand their *sotto voce* grumbling conversations. I must also be able to interpret the flight of the bird that betrays the presence of an enemy to the herd. The elephant's sense of hearing is very acute, and when he catches the slightest sound, no matter how faint or soft, his own grumbling is lowered to the same soft and gentle note.

For the moment there was no cause for fear. But in an hour, when the sun would have climbed out of the darkness in the far east and the first tender pink of dawn would be visible on the horizon, the scouts would detach themselves from the main herd and the battle between elephant and man would begin. Meanwhile, I sauntered along behind the elephants, oblivious of the whole world.

But this morning some odd premonition made me uneasy. For the fourth time I had to relight my pipe, a sure sign of nervousness and indecision. I felt insecure, without sense of purpose. If I had been wise I

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

would have turned back and undertaken nothing that day. But I interpreted this feeling as cowardice and refused even to consider the possibility of turning back. Forward march! No matter how things might develop, I had to accept the possibility that someday I might die in a fight with the elephants; if not to-day, then perhaps to-morrow or the day after.

Suddenly I heard a crashing and splashing. It was caused by the elephants as they broke through the swamp into the sea of reeds and sounded an ominous warning note. Only the deep rushing of the water was still missing to make Nature's symphony, 'Elephants at Lake Chad', complete.

The vanguard of the herd had succeeded in breaking through the swamps into the sea of reeds. The elephants moved through the great reed mass at Lake Chad with the same easy, swinging stride we human beings use sauntering along a boulevard. Once they have reached the reed ocean, the air is laden with a bewildering and frightening sound, and at the same time the sense of distance from the herd is completely wiped out. Thus one loses one's most valuable safeguard, and what that means every experienced hunter will readily understand.

All at once, the crashing and splashing ceased. Only a faint echo could still be heard. I had learned to interpret this sudden silence. It meant that a large part of the herd had reached open water. I began to talk to myself. 'Perhaps you'll have your big chance this morning in the open water. . . . Move on quickly and make a right turn to by-pass the herd. . . . If only there wasn't that barrier of reeds ahead of you. . . . Move on . . . you've got to get through . . . it will

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

work out somehow. . . . Take it easy now or you'll be out of breath when you reach the open water, and that's just the time you'll need every ounce of lung power you've got.'

Except for a couple of stragglers, the entire herd was already wading in two feet of water. They were standing in a long, narrow body of muddy water completely covered with the big, velvety leaves of a giant swamp plant on whose short, thick, fleshy stalks the snow-white blossoms had only just opened. One felt as if embedded in a sea of blossoms. Flocks of pelicans were resting on the water, enhancing the serene charm of the picture. For the nature lover this is a wonderful sight, and I could not bear to tear myself away.

The small plovers, in a hurry to find the still-sleeping insects on which they feed, were flitting with lightning speed above the big leaves covering the whole water. And the indefinable, iridescent blue of the wild geese, which had gathered here by the hundreds, added to the beauty of the colourful radiance of the morning. But the most fascinating sight of all were the elephants. In watching them, one forgets everything else. Their trunks dip into the lake with the sinuous elegance of a snake as they slowly suck up the water, then with the same swinging ease guide their trunks to their mouths in order to refresh themselves with the first drink of the morning.

Some elephants stride rough-shod through all this splendour, ravaging the blossoms. They pull up big bundles of swamp plants out of the ground and throw them on to their broad backs.

'Rough' and 'ravaging' – who am I to say this? Here I stand, in the midst of one of the most beautiful

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

and peaceful scenes that a man may ever hope to see – and what am I planning to do? Am I not also a ravager? But the passion of the hunt takes over again. ‘Move on quickly . . . a little to the left but not too much or you’ll get into range of their scent. Now go ahead quickly. . . .’ Suddenly I could no longer move; I was stuck in the mud. I would have liked to retrace my steps, but an advance guard was turning off to the right, heading straight for me. My retreat was cut off! There were more than twenty giants in the groups, led by a perfect colossus with circular tusks that seemed to reach to his eyes, making him look twice as aggressive. As luck would have it, he seemed to be in an evil humour.

He trumpeted in short, angry screams and stormed straight at me, his ears standing out stiffly and his trunk raised. He couldn’t see me as yet; he was still forty yards away. I had four rounds left in the magazine of my gun and one in the barrel, but what good could they do against more than twenty elephants? Now they were hardly thirty yards away. . . . I gave a loud scream, and at this sound two hundred elephant trunks flew up into the air.

Like a condemned man who courageously bares his breast to the executioner, the bull turned his head just a little my way, still charging forward. The oral cavity was exposed – I fired. He collapsed, dying. With a deep breath of relief I ducked under water. Now I had to keep very still.

After seconds of agonized waiting, I cautiously shoved my eyes and nose above water. The herd had disintegrated into madly running groups which were racing in headlong confusion back to the place from

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

which they had started out. Now I had to get away as quickly as I could; I knew they would return, as they will never abandon their chosen path. This chaotic confusion is only a passing phase; it does not last long.

At this moment, I heard the cries of a young elephant. His calls came at regular intervals, and from this I could tell that he was a calf. He was crying for his mother, who, in the first shock of her fright and the general confusion, had fled with the herd. I had to reach the baby elephant and get the towline around his legs before his mother returned. The little elephant pushed toward me with fervour, glad to be near a living creature. I just had time to make his acquaintance by shoving my hand into his mouth and letting him take a few greedy sucks; after that I had to disappear presto, for his mother might come back for him any minute.

The elephant calf clung to my heels, and for very good reasons. Any very young animal feels unequal to the struggle for existence and clings from sheer necessity to another living creature because it knows that it still is not able to fend for itself. In order to prevent the calf from following me, and only for this reason, I tied up his legs.

The mother elephant had not yet returned to attack, so the few seconds' delay which the catching of the young elephant involved might easily have led to a dangerous incident. For there is no hope of even temporary peace until the cow has one unsuccessful attack behind her.

This morning I was convinced that she was lurking close by, although as yet I couldn't see her. I knew one thing, however: if I didn't soon get out of this mud, I

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

was lost, for in this sticky slime it was impossible to move freely.

But things rarely happen according to plan. The raging mother elephant attacked me right here in the mud, where I was unable to manoeuvre freely. There is a moment when a man reaches the limits of physical and moral stamina, when he surrenders to fate, and no longer attempts to evade the death that seems to lie in wait for him.

Never before had I felt so weak, so impotent, as this morning; I was simply overwhelmed by a feeling of unresisting, indeed comforting, submission. And yet it was by no means the first time that I stood face to face with a raging mother elephant.

When I speak of an elephant's ears as being stiff and as fanning out at right angles to his head, I don't mean anything that you see at a zoo. The giant ears of the African elephant not only stick out, they are like steel plates, so taut and rigid that they don't flutter for a fraction of an inch. The trunk is raised as straight as a ramrod into the air. Only the tip of the trunk is bent, a hand's breadth, and points in the direction of the enemy. The small eyes stare at the man before them with a terrifying, fixed intensity. When an animal attacks, he makes no sound of any kind.

The moment I came into her field of vision, the cow raced forward at top speed. She charged straight at me, and in a second the enraged animal was engulfed in a roaring, spurting mountain of water. I felt as if all the elephants in the world had been let loose against me.

I would not even have realized that I had fired into the midst of the churning, splashing mass of water if I hadn't been forcibly reminded by the painful kick of

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

my rifle. Mechanically, from force of habit, I threw myself to the left, into a tangle of swamp plants, and ducked under water. Something went rushing past me; evidently the cow had not collapsed.

I rose to the surface, determined to make a clean kill, but first I had to load. The magazine first jammed, and at the next try the cartridge slipped through and dropped into the water. I tried again, more slowly this time – the mechanism jammed again. ‘Now hurry up’, I told myself, and I got the last cartridge into the barrel, just in the nick of time. The cow had already turned, and I missed a clean kill. She turned her broad chest my way for a second, I took aim a little high and to the right, fired, and the six-ton elephant sank to her knees.

I had to get out of this hell quickly, re-load quickly. In the breastpocket which I had made specially for this purpose, not a single cartridge was to be found. I fumbled around, tearing at the pocket, but it was empty. This morning I had taken along two clips of five cartridges each, I could have sworn to it, but now I couldn’t find a single one.

Suddenly I heard a loud, clear voice calling the familiar warning, ‘*Bature komoon*’. Like lightning, I turned around, trying to see who was calling. It was Colo. He was standing next to the elephant calf, determined to help his master. This was the first time I had heard him use his voice. He had seen the danger that was threatening me; although I was unaware, and he was screaming a warning. As I watched, his slim legs, like the tightly pulled string on a strong bow, knifed through the water, carrying him away at an incredible speed.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

Colo, this Colo, could talk and run better than any of the other boys. I felt my face relax into happy laughter, but a split second later it took on a very different expression.

Five giant animals were lunging toward me; they had formed a solid wall and were charging in what looked like a shoulder-to-shoulder formation. Only when they were less than fifteen yards from me did I discover a small gap between the first and the second elephant. Where had they come from so suddenly? I had not heard or seen them approach. It is a riddle, but it is a way these huge animals have, this sudden, mysterious appearance, neither heard nor seen by any human being. All at once they are simply there! With no ammunition left, I gathered myself together and jumped into the gap between the first and second elephants. As I leaped, my gun slipped through my fingers, the butt end forward, and with it I hit frantically at a junk w' i' i' was already whizzing heavily down at me.

A ringin' in my head, and down I went in blissful oblivion.

Everythin' was still dark and hazy when I returned to the ugly world of reality. My stomach was uncomfortably full of mucky water, which was probably the reason for my quick return to consciousness. But the more my head cleared, the more aware I became of my physical aches and pains.

The ringing in my head I wrote off as unimportant, but the fact that I could use only one leg was somewhat more serious. The worst of all was that the moment I tried to stand up straight I had excruciating pains and so had to creep cautiously, bent over like an old man.





## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

I diagnosed my injuries as a few fractured ribs and an injured leg. I could do nothing about the leg for the time, as I was still stuck in the mud. Somehow, I knew, I had to get out, and quickly at that, for the herd which had split up was now in the process of regrouping.

On my left, embedded in a sea of snow-white blossoms, sprawled the corpse of the young bull. On my right lay the mortally wounded cow, the mother of the calf. At intervals she made the air tremble with her screams, and every few minutes, like a periscope that pushes above water, she shoved her trunk into the air.

With the tip of her trunk she found my scent, for I was to windward. Forty yards ahead of me stretched the reeds, and there I should find dry ground. I knew that somehow I had to manage to drag myself there. I struggled forward in intense pain, but after a few agonizing movements I stopped again. I looked over at the dying cow; she was bleeding profusely and a big patch of the water in front of her was coloured a deep blood-red. Once again she raised her trunk into the air and sent out a series of screams in all directions.

Now I was from the cow. She was talking in her language. I wished I could understand it. It was an unnatural skin, for it was against nature,

I longed to witness to the people before me whether the animal had any

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

volved in robbing a fellow creature of its freedom, that very freedom which is also the highest and the ultimate human goal.

Another twenty yards and I would reach the high reeds; then I would be able to lie down and wait until the boys found me. Once again, I could hear the low murmuring of the dying cow; she still had her trunk lifted straight up in the air, scanning all directions. Again and again her pitiful plaints and appeals for help pursued me. I felt deeply shaken. Another ten yards and I would have reached the reeds. Now that I was in shallow water, I could see that I had two flesh wounds on my shin and a very badly swollen foot. But I was quite unable to say how all this had happened.

Again and again I had to glance at the cow. She was becoming very restless and continued to sway her trunk in the air. I reached the edge of the reeds and, half lying down, half sitting, I watched the tragic drama caused by the work of man.

More than thirty elephants were now breaking through the reeds at a good pace. They were trying to reach the niches of the papyrus swamp so that they could rest and re-group. Suddenly, four elephants stepped out in front of the group. Their ears fanned out at right angles and their trunks were lifted and searching the air in all directions; then, cautiously, stopping from time to time to look around, they made their way, first of all, to the dead bull.

When they reached him, they all lowered their trunks and touched his body. I could hear their low murmuring and I wondered if they were saying a last prayer for their murdered comrade or whether they were taking an oath to avenge him. At last, they all

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

lifted their trunks and proceeded cautiously and quietly to the side of the dying cow. By some sort of communication, they must have intercepted her calls for help.

The four Samaritans now started a truly charitable rescue work. Lowering their heads, they pushed their trunks under the neck and chest of the dying cow in an attempt to heave her up. I have never seen human beings act more humanely than these beasts.

Now the cow was on her own feet. On each side of her stood two of the good Samaritans, their mighty trunks supporting the chest and neck of their wounded comrade, their broad, flat heads propping her up on each side to prevent her falling. The hindquarters of the cow were alarmingly unsteady, threatening to collapse at any moment. Then followed a low conversation; again and again I heard the deep murmuring grumble.

Finally, the two rescue workers in the rear disengaged themselves and slung their trunks under her belly, lifting her back into an upright position. When the cow was once more steadied, another low, murmuring consultation took place. After that was over, they all started to move forward. The wounded cow threatened to sink down time and again, and they made slow progress. The two elephants who were providing the rear support had a hard time of it. Over and over, the body of the wounded cow would list to one side, and when the helper stationed there exerted his last ounce of strength to steady her again, she would list heavily to the other side. Then it was the elephant on that side who had to brace himself against her whole weight.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

It was the wounded cow, herself, however, who continued to weave her trunk and take the scent, and who kept alert against the coming of an enemy. Her trunk was held constantly in the air and she kept turning its tip diligently in every direction. The cor-tege struggled on for a few yards until the dying cow reached her calf. Lovingly, she lowered her trunk so that she could embrace her baby.

In the following seconds the tragic spectacle took a new, horrifying turn: with a terrible cry, the mother wound her trunk around the child, flung it a yard above the water, and hurled it down at her feet. Collapsing, she expended her last strength in trampling her own child to death. As though stricken with horror, the four Samaritans hurried off at a run.

Like a ghost who always materializes when I am in the most desperate need, I found Colo beside me. I could speak to him only in a whisper, for talking out loud or even taking a deep breath gave me stabbing pains in the left side of my chest.

‘Go and get my gun, it must be lying somewhere in the water.’

To show that he had understood me. Colo drew the air in noisily through half-parted lips and clenched teeth. Then he went off.

Only an hour before, Colo was able to scream at me in Berberi, now this strange human being was silent once more. He brought my gun and, without a word, put it down beside me. ‘Get some of the bearers and bring Baa.’

Colo departed. I was alone, and now at last I had time to look around me and to think over everything that had taken place. Hundreds of carrion kites were

## ONE ADVENTURE AMONG MANY

squatting on the corpses of the elephants, which had already begun to swell. Filled with gluttony and greed, those vultures would strike at each other. They didn't attempt to sink their strong hooked beaks into the thick skins of the dead animals. They could not get at the thinner belly skin, because the bodies were submerged in the water. Meanwhile, hundreds of additional kites were circling in the air, waiting for the first lot to get their fill and then to alight in the shady trees to digest their feast. Over the lake, the swarming insect life kept up a steady whirring and buzzing. The little white plover, untroubled by the drama that had just taken place, skimmed busily above the fleshy leaves of the swamp plants, in search of sustenance. The wild duck and wild geese were equally indifferent to the elephant tragedy, more interested in the delicacies they love. And, as always, I became fascinated by that most beautiful and largest member of the stork family, the saddle-billed stork.

I heard my boys approaching. With great difficulty I succeeded in mounting my stallion. My injured leg was tied to his back. Four days later I arrived at my bush station, and there for nearly three months I lay on the floor of my grass hut, unable to use my left leg.

## THE DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

ALTHOUGH ALL MY baby elephants died, it was four years before I discovered why this happened. My first calf began to bloat after the fourth day, not very much, it is true, but still enough for me to notice it. I knew of no way to stop this, and it was most depressing to stand by helpless in the face of death.

From early evening until late morning I gave the baby elephant a feeding of one to one and a half quarts of milk every hour and a half to two hours. I used raw cow's milk, straining it through linen.

Nothing seemed to be wrong with this formula, yet I knew from the first day that I had omitted to do something.

Perhaps I should mention here that ever since I was a boy I have raised young animals. While I was still a child I took care of our young calves. I did not know that you must allow a calf to suck at your fingers and my father boxed my ears soundly when I said, 'The calf doesn't want to nurse!'

We lived in the midst of a forest that was rich in game of all sorts. By the time I was twelve years old, I had already raised day-old fawns, foxes, squirrels, and many birds of different species, although my father had strictly forbidden it.

When I was barely eighteen, I went to sea and I never came home from a voyage without bringing with me at least a dozen animals of assorted varieties. They came from every corner of the world, and I raised them all with great success.

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

Later on, I became a practising animal man. I caught my own animals and soon learned that the younger you catch them the more successful you will be in raising them. And here I should like to issue a warning against the practice of applying to wild animals the lessons learned from zoo experience. The totally different conditions under which animals live in their free state demand simpler methods. Practically, as well as theoretically, no schools exist to teach this kind of profession. If I were asked the number of different species of animal I have raised in the thirty-five years of my professional life, I could give no answer, for I would not know the scientific names for many of my animals. But if I were asked to say which young animals gave me the most trouble, I would answer immediately, chimpanzees. It took me eight years to reach a point where I could be sure of pulling them through their infancy.

But to get back to my first elephant baby. I fed him a total of eight quarts of raw milk (with the same fat content) a day; this should have been ample. In my opinion, the digestive systems of young animals should be exercised to their fullest, otherwise they will be condemned to semi-activity in later life and all because their trainers had faddish ideas.

If, in order to be rid of my worries, I were to sterilize the milk and supplement it with easily digestible foods, I would most certainly jeopardize the baby's future resistance. How can a wild animal obtain pasteurized milk? And if one remembers that a mother elephant wallows in mud and stinking mire, mixed with her own and other animal droppings, that her teats are smeared with all this and that her baby sucks greedily

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

at this filth, then such a hygienic measure as the filtering of milk seems a rather useless precaution. If I did it anyway, it was only in order to comfort myself with the thought that I had done everything possible to ensure the elephant calf's health.

In my despair I tried supplementing the baby's diet with simple foods of all kinds and even wrote to the zoo vets asking for help and advice. For the death of these helpless animal children depressed me to such an extent that I felt I could bear it no longer. It took me weeks to recover from the death of each of my little elephants.

During this time, however, I learned to solve that most difficult of problems – how to travel with an elephant herd. Primarily, I wanted to be able to watch mother and child when they were alone together. I felt that perhaps this would give me a clue to why I had failed. During these day-and-night vigils, I learned a lot about elephants but I did not discover what I was doing wrong.

By the time I made my nineteenth catch in the lower part of Lake Chad, I knew my elephants. If they had come to this out-of-the-way place it was to be in peace, safe from interference. To reach this spot they had travelled more than fifty miles in one night. And even here they were not safe, for, in the course of four years of elephant hunting, after many failures, I had at last learned to find my way through this labyrinth of mudholes.

On the second morning after their flight, I had already caught up with the elephants. At night they left their hide-out, far to the rear of the mudholes, in order to gorge themselves on the giant pumpkins which grew here in a perfect paradise of a mudhole.

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

Only one old bull stayed behind . . . I knew him well. It is the usual custom for the old bull of the herd to follow an hour or two after the rest. I remained with him and he led me by a short cut which saved me having to find the way. It is also much easier to follow a single elephant without being noticed.

On this particular morning I allowed the giant bull to lead the way in the hope that I would capture my nineteenth elephant that day. We reached our objective about nine o'clock in the morning and found two herds which had joined forces.

From where I stood on the clear, sandy bottom of the lake, in less than two feet of water and thick reeds, I could overlook the whole peaceful scene. For the first time I saw a group of kob mingling with the elephants and even running around under their bellies. Everything was in my favour, only the antelopes worried me because I knew their sharp eyes would spot me soon and their watchful leader would then give the small, surprised warning cough that would announce my presence to the elephants.

I could do nothing for the moment. I had to wait for a better opportunity. Two hours must have passed when suddenly the antelopes assembled and swung off to the right. Now I dared move up close to the herds, but I told the four men who had come with me to stay behind.

The herd was hardly moving, ambling along at a snail's pace, first a little to the left, then a little to the right. The animals felt so safe that they hadn't even bothered to post sentinels. I was certainly the first man to follow them into this sanctuary.

A big herd on my left turned off to the left in order to

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

reach the high reeds and deep water ahead. A smaller herd on my right followed suit, except that it chose the opposite direction. It was almost eleven o'clock, the time when elephants like to take a short siesta in the deep water and cool shade. Unless a good opportunity arose before then, I would be able to do nothing more that day.

Furthermore, a light breeze was coming directly from the left, so the herd that was now moving off to the right would pick up my scent at any moment. The lead animals would surely be able to detect me soon. It was impossible to predict how the situation would develop from there on. Had I been sensible, I would have run back out of range; I cannot explain why, just on this particular morning, I was so foolhardy. I was only forty yards from the herd, on its left, when I gave in to an inexplicable urge to advance.

Both herds got my scent at practically the same moment. The result was unimaginable chaos. It can be explained to some extent: an elephant herd follows its leader exactly as a company of soldiers follows its captain. The leader makes all decisions for the herd.

It was easy for me to survey the indescribable confusion, for I stood in two feet of water among low reeds (only three feet high). I was in an ideal position, for the soft, brittle reeds, shallow water, and firm sand bottom allowed me to manoeuvre freely.

The main body of the herd was trying to reach the cover of the high reeds where the water was five to six feet deep. Groups of two to ten lost their heads entirely and ran back and forth wildly. My heart beat with joy as a group of three grown elephants and two calves came straight at me.

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

One of the young elephants was just the right size for my purposes, about four feet high, as I could easily estimate by comparing him with the height of the reeds. The other calf, whose dark, shiny back just reached to the top of the reeds, could only have been about three feet high and was therefore still a real nursling.

I just had time to give a quick whistle, the signal I had agreed on with my boys. You must remember that an encounter of this kind never lasts more than a few seconds. Three big elephants and two small ones now came racing toward me. A bull was in the lead, then came a cow, and behind her ran another cow with the two babies. I had to attack quickly, for if I stepped aside I would run straight under the feet of another group.

As I went into action, I took a quick look behind me – there were still forty yards between me and the second group at the left. I fired. The lead elephant went down on to his knees. One of the cows, refusing to be frightened off by the death of her companion, rushed wildly ahead.

I gave a hoarse shout. The perplexed cow stopped short and turned her head. I fired again . . . the cow collapsed. The bull tried to get up, he was swaying as if his head were too heavy for him, then he sank back to the ground. He pulled himself up, again and again, as if he had suddenly been awakened.

This whole wild scene took place in less than a minute. Then the rest of the group that had been charging me ran off to join the main body of the herd which had taken refuge in the high reeds. The dead cow lay only fifteen yards in front of me, next to her stood the two

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

calves, and just a little way off struggled the big bull.

I went close to him but he did not notice me. I fired a *coup de grâce* and he fell dead, splashing me with a fountain of water.

Now I turned my attention to the baby elephants. The older of the two charged me just as he had seen his elders do. It was a comical sight. Mimicking his roars, I rushed at him. He stopped short in terrified silence, wheeled suddenly, and rushed off at top speed.

This was the time my boys were supposed to move up and help me. Usually, they managed to get to the scene of action, but they never were of any help. Even now, in our fourth year of elephant hunting, no matter how often I showed them what to do, it was to no avail. I would move up to a few paces behind the elephant child, grab hold of his tail tassel, and straddle his back. They never had the courage to follow my example.

Colo was the only one of the boys who nerved himself a few times to catch hold of the tassel, but at the first enraged screams from the small elephant he always let go and ran away. It is, of course, quite impossible for a man to restrain a four-foot elephant all by himself.

I took a few heavy spills with the little fellow, but when I saw I wasn't going to get any help from the boys this morning either, I gave up in disgust and turned to the little nursling, standing by the head of his dead mother. He was too young to know that his mother was dead – too young, too, to realize that man was his enemy.

This was the first time I had captured a calf through shooting a cow; it was also the first time I had taken a

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

baby directly away from his mother. And it was through this coincidence that I learned why all my elephant children had died.

Although not at all upset by our arrival, the baby elephant took a dim view of being separated from his mother. It took five men to pull him away by main force. The calf was in a state of terrific excitement. Two men had hold of his big ears and three more pushed from behind. I stood directly behind him. At the height of this excitement the little elephant emptied his bowels. I was expecting something of this kind and it was for this very reason that I had taken up my position in the rear. For years I had wanted to be present when a baby had a stool for the first time after being separated from his mother.

To-day, at last, the opportunity came. Quickly grabbing my felt hat off my head, I caught the whole mess in it. After I had examined it for a few seconds, I suddenly saw the light. My ignorance – stupidity might perhaps be a better word – had killed eighteen elephant children. The proof was in my hat.

The first thing I noticed was the colour of the stool. It was almost black. As my readers will remember, at certain times of the year the water of Lake Chad gives a lasting dark colour to the droppings of the animals who drink it. The two herds had moved down from the north very quickly. In a single night they had covered fifty miles and then, weary of my presence, retreated into the southern lake labyrinth. I had managed to keep up with them and, moreover, had been lucky enough to find the old bull who had led me so efficiently that I had reached the hide-out the very next day. Here, in the middle region, the water was clear. If I

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

had waited another twenty-four hours, the stool would no longer have been dark and I would not have been able to tell that the baby elephant had drunk a lot of water.

When I examined the baby's stool I needed no magnifying glass to see that it contained bits of completely undigested reed. How could these reed fragments have got into the stomach of a nursing baby? Quite easily. The herd had travelled through the reeds that morning and had trampled down great masses of them. These reeds break easily and they have a way of floating on top of the water. When the baby drank, the smaller reed fragments slid down his throat unnoticed and ended up in his stomach. The larger fragments were pushed out by his tongue. This second discovery was additional proof that my baby elephant had drunk quantities of water. Furthermore, it showed me clearly that he must have had his first drink in the early morning and that, judging by the number of reeds in the stool, he must have swallowed gallons of water.

Whether or not this was the only condition essential to the successful rearing of elephant calves was another question and one which could only be settled by further experimentation. That was my next task.

By this time I knew a good deal about the family life of the elephant; I had learned to stay right with the herd and to travel with it. Now I knew that elephants feed their babies only after they emerge from the deep water and that the feedings are given at two-hour intervals, about four to six of them per night. The quantity did not seem to be too important.

On this particular morning I went to the shore of the lake with my nineteenth baby elephant and allowed it,

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

under Colo's guidance, to play all day in a small lake that was partly covered with reeds. I lay down to rest on a near-by sand dune and from this vantage point I could overlook the whole lake. For the first time, since I need no longer expect a surprise attack from an enraged mother elephant, I could enjoy with a care-free heart the happy sight of Colo romping with the baby elephant.

Compared to my former state of mind, it was a tremendous relief. You must remember that frequently I was ready by six o'clock to capture a baby elephant and that, while my boys led him away, I would spend the rest of the day and night trying to draw the attacks of the enraged cow in my direction so the boys would have enough time to put a safe distance between them and the scene of the catch.

With the exception of Colo and Bukhari II, the boys could now lie down and sleep. It was Colo's job to watch the baby elephant. And Bukhari II, the only boy who was at home in the Chad, knew his role well. As soon as we caught a little elephant, he would take one of our two horses and gallop off to the nearest village to find some cows. I was not wholly dependent on cows, however; for some time I had been carrying around two crates of canned milk which I diluted and gave to the calf. On this occasion, Bukhari II and a Fula boy arrived before dark with four cows which yielded nine quarts of milk. For a baby elephant this is a plentiful day's - or rather night's - supply.

In my despair over the death of my other elephant babies, I had boiled the milk, but now I felt that straining would be a sufficient precaution. We poured the milk into long-necked bottles and packed them

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

into special feeding boxes for use during the night. We sewed the long necks of the bottles into soft gazelle leather because young nurslings dislike the feel of uncovered glass. Through the bottle cork I stuck six straws. This permitted the dispensing of milk quite similar to nursing from the actual teat. Near the bottom of the bottle I drilled a small hole which could be plugged up with a thorn. So many of these thorns were lying around that you could throw them away after each feeding. In the feeding box I also kept a two-quart aluminium pot in which the milk could be heated quickly to body temperature.

My night's work began an hour after sunset, when I led my willing elephant baby out of the water. We would then go for a walk, loitering or coming to a full stop beside every bush or tree, wandering aimlessly with no fixed goal, just as a mother elephant would do if she were conducting the outing.

There was no need to worry. The elephant stuck close to my heels, nuzzling constantly with his trunk at my body since I was now to substitute for his real mother. .

Oftentimes, as soon as we stepped out of the water, sometimes as much as an hour later, I would hear a soft, deep trumpeting behind me. Since this was only a hint and not meant to be taken seriously, I did not let it bother me.

The baby's real mother would have behaved in much the same way, for at night, when elephants emerge from the water, they are always in a great hurry to reach their feeding grounds and satisfy their hunger.

After a while the trumpeting would grow louder but I still did not worry, knowing very well that an ele-

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

phant mother never pays any attention to these first demands. Finally, there would come such a trumpeting and screaming that, the first time I heard it, I was not only astonished but definitely frightened.

I heard this booming voice for the first time in the darkness of the night. It came from behind me and I ran madly for my life, convinced that I was already as good as caught under the feet of a full-grown elephant. However, when the uproar showed no signs of abating even at close range, I gradually became suspicious and, stealing a backward glance, discovered to my surprise that I had fled from my own child. Those ear-splitting screams, audible even at a distance of a mile or more when a herd passes at night, are usually the trumpetings of young elephants demanding to be nursed. The more nurslings a herd possesses, the louder the roaring; therefore, you can estimate pretty accurately the number of babies by the volume of the sound. It is exactly like a human family: the more infants, the more noise.

When an elephant calf starts his loud trumpeting, his guardian must make a choice: either he can feed his charge immediately or he can let him wait. At this point the young elephant may come to a sudden stop, no longer willing to follow. The wise foster parent pays no attention to this. Nor does he fear that his baby will get lost in the dark, not even if the stubborn little animal fails to run and catch up with his master.

If the elephant baby comes to a stop, he will (as I explained in an earlier chapter) bellow at regular intervals for his mother, trumpeting so loudly that he can be heard for miles around. Unless the distance is too great, however, you can imitate his mother and

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

answer him with a deep growl. The infant will follow the direction of the sound. As a last stratagem in his campaign to be fed, the little elephant will simply plant himself squarely in front of his 'mother'.

You can detour around him, and repeat that manoeuvre several times. But after that the game is up. For at this point the calf will refuse to budge, often flinging himself down to the ground as if he had been struck dead. You can allow matters to reach this pass without worrying, because an elephant family will do exactly the same, once the baby is two or three weeks old. (During the first fortnight the cow remains in hiding with her child, enjoying her maternal bliss.) But once things have reached this stage, the human as well as the elephant mother must feed the child.

It was dusk when I emerged from Lake Chad with my newly captured nineteenth elephant. After only a quarter of an hour on dry land, he stormily demanded to be fed and I obliged with a quart of milk. In less than an hour he demanded a second feeding with equal vehemence. After the excitement and the complete evacuation of the morning, this was certainly not surprising. This time, I put him off for a half hour. Between night and morning I fed my charge seven times, but each time with only one quart of raw cow's milk heated to body temperature.

In our nightly wandering I put about three hours of walking time between myself and the Chad, heading for a water-hole which I knew to be still full, so I would have the necessary water for man and beast.

In the morning, after a two-hour rest I gave my charge - or, I should rather say, I tried to give him - the amount of water that seemed right to me. As in

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

the case of the milk, he sucked greedily at the neck of the bottle. But when the first drops of water trickled over my little gourmet's tongue and down into his throat, I received such a push in the stomach from his head and trunk that I went sprawling into the soft sand, where I lay ignominiously on my back. The bottle I lost in mid-air.

When I had recovered from my surprise, I picked up the bottle, cleaned the sand out of it, and tried again. But no sooner had I started than my young hopeful fell upon me in a fury.

Twice was enough. After I had picked myself up for the second time, I vented my rage and despair on the elephant calf. With the parting advice, 'Drop dead for all I care, you crazy little beast,' I left him and, lying down under a shady tree, tried to think up a new approach.

There could be no other explanation. The evidence which I had found pointed clearly to one answer, and that was water. I waited two hours and tried my luck again. But good heavens, how is it possible for a small elephant child to fly into such a tantrum when something goes against his grain?

On the morning of the second day I repeated my efforts to force water down the baby's throat, only to be met with the same furious opposition. I also undertook some body measurements, repeating them three times a day so I would have accurate data concerning any possible distension which, on such a big body surface, could easily escape the naked eye. It must be taken into account that an elephant child is not nursed during the daytime; his last feeding takes place at 6 A.M. and he is not fed again until an hour

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

after sunset, or about 7 P.M. His stomach is therefore completely empty during the day and should consequently measure less rather than more. So the two-inch increase my baby elephant showed on the second day was certainly ominous.

On the third day his body circumference grew by more than three times this figure, the evening's measurements showing a total increase of seven inches.

The baby elephant continued to demand his nightly feedings with his usual eagerness, drinking them down willingly. All my efforts to smuggle a ration of water in among the milk bottles resulted in failure. In regard to everything else, I held my nursling to a regimen that duplicated the life he would have led had he been free.

From sunset to sunrise I walked him without a stop in the brush and in the high grass, feeding him only at his insistent demand.

On the fourth day measurements were no longer necessary; even the naked eye could observe the enormous distension that had taken place. I had seen eighteen elephant babies swell up in exactly the same way after the fourth or fifth day and I had been powerless to help them. All eighteen of them had died. Was I to see my nineteenth little elephant die too? Never!

For me, the fourth day was a decisive one. 'To-day he's going to get water into his stomach,' I swore, 'and if I can't force it down his throat, then I'll force it in from behind!'

By early afternoon of the fourth day the swelling had reached fifteen inches. I debated with myself. I had to reach a decision. It was the last day, the last

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

hour, which could either keep life in my elephant child or bring about his death. I decided to march to Lake Chad with my charge.

If I wanted to reach the lake before sunset, I had to start immediately, for it was a good three hours' walk. I wondered whether the elephant would move in a blaze of heat that would try even a man's will power, and it was another question whether he could survive a march of this kind. To make matters worse, the longest lap of our journey led through completely open and unshaded country.

I made my decision: the men must carry the small amount of luggage, the cows could be herded along in our rear, and the horses would lead. Off we went. The elephant child followed me willingly as I marched along under the broiling sun in the direction of Lake Chad. Whenever we arrived at a shade tree he lingered in its shadow, and if I pushed ahead without waiting he trumpeted angrily. However, after a five- or ten-minute rest, he not only followed me but actually shoved me forward.

On this march I made an interesting discovery. It was impossible for me to get a good over-all view of the country, and I landed in a deep gully, a completely dried-out water-hole so densely overgrown that in order to spare man and beast I decided to turn back. But the elephant child was opposed to this idea and refused to retrace his steps. His first protest took the form of a deep growling, but when I insisted on having my way he flew into a rage, banging his head about and screaming furiously.

I was forced to fight my way through the under-brush barrier, for that was what my charge wanted.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

Somehow, I felt he must have a reason for his stubborn behaviour. Of course, he might simply have been lured by the shadow of the underbrush, but I harboured a secret suspicion which I would be able to test as soon as we cleared the underbrush.

For some time I had been impressed by the purposeful way my nineteenth baby elephant was hurrying ahead. Now, if I wanted to rest a little under a tree, I was urged forward by deep, angry growls. The little fellow was in more and more of a hurry; he kept pushing more and more insistently from behind.

When we were clear of the underbrush, I tried to turn back – but all in vain: the elephant refused to follow me. After waiting awhile, I tried another half turn and this time he followed me docilely for a little while, then came to a stop, stood a long while without trumpeting, lifted his trunk, swaying it about in the air, followed me a few more steps and stopped again, but this time in rather a hesitant manner. Obviously he was concentrating hard on something. After he had repeated this a couple of times, I could see that he was not going to do any more following.

But once I had reset my course in the direction of the Chad, everything was in order. We were still a good seven miles from the lake, and, to test my theory, I repeated this manoeuvre frequently, until there was little doubt that even a young elephant can gauge the direction of a body of water at a distance of seven miles or more. The conclusive evidence came when we neared the shore of the lake.

As we crossed the last dune-like formations, I was pushed so violently from behind that, unable to stand it any longer, I jumped aside. Rushing over the dunes

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

at breakneck speed, the elephant child ran straight into the reed-covered water.

He stood in the shallows screaming pitifully. Not even my arrival could quiet him. I saw that he wanted to drink, but although he was working hard at it, even trying to push his head under water, he was unsuccessful because where he stood the lake was only two feet deep. I tried going in ahead, expecting him to follow, but my efforts were fruitless; he stayed where he was. It seemed to me that he was afraid to take a single step for fear of losing the life-giving water.

Quickly I whistled to my boys for help, ordering them to scratch, dig, and shovel the earth from under the baby's belly. The boys, who had all been with me a long while, and had watched the sad deaths of my other elephant calves, understood our dilemma at once. We had no tools of any kind, so the job was difficult, but we accomplished it. As my boys dug frantically, the little elephant sank down further and further until, at a depth of three feet, the muddy, stirred-up water ran straight into his open mouth.

As night came, we stood by in boundless astonishment. Without a pause, he greedily gulped down the dirty brew. His body swelled like a balloon – I didn't interfere, although I felt like shouting, 'Stop, or you'll burst!' The balloon did not blow up as I had feared, but at last a series of thunderous explosions came from the rear end of my little elephant. I was overjoyed. When it was all over a docile and healthy elephant baby followed me through brush and steppe all night long, screaming for his milk as he had always done before, eager and greedy as though nothing had happened.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

If I wanted to keep my charge alive, I had to adopt a routine of day-and-night duty. The inarticulate but reliable Colo, who was always considerate in his dealings with animals, was chosen for the day's watch; or, to put it more accurately, Colo was assigned as a playmate to the little elephant. We had christened the baby, giving him the name of Baga because I had caught him near a hamlet of that name.

Every morning just after sunrise Baga was handed over to Colo, who immediately trotted off with him toward Lake Chad, about half a mile away. In any case, Baga would not have waited long but would have ambled off toward the water without being led. The trouble was that he could not be without company for long and, of course, would never have returned on his own. The noise that he made was so awful that the few natives in the neighbouring hamlet looked for a whole herd. They had no idea that one young elephant could make the air quiver with his screaming. But if Baga had his playmate Colo with him, all was well.

Poor Colo had to suffer a lot. In moments of high spirits Baga would thrash back and forth, playing in the reeds, and his idea of really fine sport was to run Colo down.

My efforts to give Colo a day's rest now and then were frustrated by the inability of any of the other boys to survive Baga's idea of play. They simply ran away. But the superhuman Colo, toughened by so many trials, bore this one, too, with silent laughter.

A good hour after sunset Colo would emerge from the water with Baga, and then I would take over for the night. Late in the evening baby bottles were filled with twelve quarts of milk and were stowed away in a

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

suitable box which was carried about by two boys who took turns at this chore all night long. As soon as Baga had been handed over to me, I sauntered forth. The two boys could either follow or go ahead, but they had to stay near enough to hear me if I whistled. On the whole, the plan worked well.

Baga would demand his first feeding a good hour after he came out of the water. As I said before, I did exactly what his real mother would have done, letting him wait for his bottle for what must have seemed to him a mercilessly long time. He got from one to one and a half quarts at irregular intervals.

Only once did he ask for as much as ten quarts. The normal demand was for six or seven quarts a day, and Baga threw mightily on this schedule.

At first I made other attempts to feed him water out of a bottle, but all my trials were in vain. One must remember that small herd elephants stand in five to seven feet of water for eighteen hours out of every twenty-four. This produces a water pressure which must exert a definite influence on the digestive system.

At birth the elephants of Lake Chad are about three feet tall. If their early rate of growth is about two inches a month, as Baga's measurements showed, the animals would be two years old before their heads and backs would stand above the water line. I do not know the rate of growth for older wild elephants. It would certainly be a mistake to take the rate of growth of captive elephants as a norm. In any case, the growing process does not continue at the childhood rate. One thing, however, is certain. At the age of six or eight he has grown enough to have one-third of his body above the water level.

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

These observations prove conclusively that the Lake Chad elephant is a water elephant and is therefore bound so vitally to his native element that he cannot be successfully transported overseas until he is three years old, and even then only at the greatest risk.

But to get back to Baga. As I have already said, he was doing splendidly. I no longer thought of the possibility of his dying.

It was now the end of November and I decided to set my departure for the following day. I was happy in the thought of my success with Baga, overjoyed that all our hardships had been safely overcome, that we had mastered every crisis and had escaped safely. It was not easy for me to leave. Lake Chad and its elephants had taxed my endurance and physical resources to their limits, but I had formed a deep attachment for the place. Dreaming of an early return and oblivious of the whole world, I wandered that last night through the veld and brush of Lake Chad with Baga, my nineteenth baby elephant.

We made our preparations, taking every precaution that was humanly possible. On a November march to Maidugari I could still expect to find plenty of water-holes with sufficient water to allow Baga to frolic in them during the daytime to his heart's content. I had already put him on a formula of diluted canned milk so that we should not have to depend on cow's milk. He had stood the change without any trouble.

For a week a slight breeze had made the nights pleasantly cool. My four boys were also looking forward to going home and everything was set. We began our march an hour before sunset, at about five o'clock, so that, walking at a leisurely pace, by dawn we could

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS 1

reach a water-hole that was about twenty-five miles away. Even now, during our first night's march, however, the Hamatan wind set in with all its fierce power.

As my boys knew our direction, our goal, and our daily resting places, I gave them permission to march on ahead at their normal speed, ordering only the two who carried Baga's food box to stay close to me. These two boys were so bothered by the cold that they lighted fires at every little stop in order to warm themselves.

By the second night I had begun to worry. We had to cross several mile-long stretches which, although they were not actual water holes, still had one or two feet of water in them. For me, this was proof enough that, despite this year's low rainfall, there was more water than usual.

Even though the trusting Baga followed me obediently into the freezing water, he voiced his protest with a deep, dissatisfied trumpeting.

Over a period of years I have had plenty of time and opportunity to observe the ill-humour which elephants display in the morning during Hamatan-time when they are forced to step into icy cold water. Animals hate to wade into frigid water before the sun has warmed their backs. Baga's case was aggravated by that fact that he was forced to splash around in the cold water at midnight. Neither his own mother nor I had ever asked this of him before. Nevertheless, all went well the second night. What swung the balance in our favour was my ability to give Baga his feedings at body temperature.

The whole of the fourth night we marched through water that registered a shivering four degrees centi-

## WILD ELEPHANT CHASE

grade. My clothes were soaking wet and the fierce Hamatan wind cut through my body like a knife. In one fell swoop my hopes of bringing Baga safely home were dashed.

It was on this night that Baga went out to meet his death. When we finally reached a stretch of water a foot deep, he stood still, refusing any longer to follow such an unreasonable guide. In the course of the three preceding nights, I had all but lost my voice. Because of my constant efforts to imitate a mother elephant's rumbling call, my vocal chords were so hoarse and swollen that even the slightest word gave me acute pain. And now there stood Baga on a small promontory bellowing for the feeding which I had to deny him because there was no possibility of building a fire and I could only have given it to him ice-cold.

'The merciless Hamatan blew over his wet body. He not only trembled, he shook with cold. I could not possibly pour an icy fluid into his already frozen body.

Left with no other choice, I marched relentlessly ahead. Standing in the deep water, my hand pressed against my throat to ease the pain, I called to Baga again and again in his own language. He refused to come; only a pitiful, croaking cry came through the air in answer.

About half an hour later I waded back to Baga. I had no choice but to give him the feeding which he had every right to demand. Two ice-cold bottles . . . that was the end!

Docile and touchingly well-behaved, Baga followed me. In a short while his pains set in, but valiantly he fought his way across the swamps, through the freezing water that was no colder than the feedings which

## DEATH OF MY BABY ELEPHANTS

lay like ice in his stomach. Still alive but already carrying within him the seeds of his torturing death, Baga arrived with me in Maidugari, the capital of Bornu Province.

The two English doctors who were stationed there worked over Baga day and night. Eager to help, they tried every known remedy, sparing neither trouble nor expense. I took no part in these attempts at rescue, knowing well that there was nothing left to save.

So came the fifth night, the night which was to release Baga from all the troubles a human being had brought upon him. He stood beside my camp bed, his weak and trembling body wrapped in the blankets the English doctors had provided. With his trunk he embraced the foster mother who had caused his death and lay down beside my bed to die.